

Working time and working time flexibility: A Marxian approach on contemporary labor relations¹

Resumo:

Este artigo trata do tempo de trabalho e a pressão para a flexibilização da jornada de trabalho na fase atual do capitalismo, especialmente na Europa. Tratar-se-á das definições de flexibilização (Eurofound, 2009), os impactos dessas medidas sobre os trabalhadores e a luta de classes. O artigo está estruturado em 4 partes. A primeira seção pretende abordar o conceito de tempo de trabalho na economia capitalista, as análises de Marx sobre a jornada de trabalho, mais-valia absoluta e relativa e outros conceitos afins. A segunda apresenta um resumo do desenvolvimento histórico do tempo de trabalho, a luta do Trabalho-Capital, a partir de um breve panorama sobre o tempo de trabalho desde meados do século 19 até hoje. A terceira seção analisa a flexibilidade do tempo de trabalho, os diferentes tipos de regime de trabalho de tempo e as consequências para os trabalhadores. A quarta seção chama a atenção para os resultados coletivos para a classe trabalhadora da flexibilidade do tempo de trabalho.

Abstract:

This article addresses the working time and the push for flexibilization of work in the current phase of capitalism in Europe, impacts on the workers and class struggle towards it (definitions based on Eurofound 2009). In order to structure the discussion, this article is divided in four main sections. The first section intends to address the concept of working time. It discusses Marx's analyzes of the working day, absolute and relative surplus value and its association with a capitalist economy. The second provides a summary of the historical development of working time, the Labor-Capital struggle, starting from a brief overview on disputes regarding working time since the mid 19th century until today. The third section analyzes working time flexibility, it defines the different types of working time arrangements and the consequences they bring to workers and the working class. The fourth section draws attention to what this work is mainly concerned about, the collective outcomes that working time flexibility (WTF) brings to the working class.

Keywords: working time, flexibilization of working time, labor relations.

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Introduction:

The working time struggle is present in the very nature of capitalism. Since the 19th century, workers organized themselves in trade unions in order to defend their interests collectively against Capital, and one of its historical aims is to lead the struggle about reduction of working time. Goals like the 8 hours day, 5 days working week could be achieved along the last century. Fights for reduction of working time to 35 hours week were successful in countries like France and some industries in Germany. Nevertheless, just recently the European Union presented its annual survey about the working time development in the region and drew Media's attention to the issue. The survey makes public, for example, that the German workers' are those who have one of the longest actual working week with 41.2 hours. Only Romania, Czech Republic and Austria have a similar pattern. An important portion of those hours is overtime, since the collectively agreed average working week is 37.6 hours. The difference between the agreed hours and the actual ones brings out the question of how those differences appear and why the trade unions are not able to push the companies to stick to the agreements. Additionally, even a country that has a strong trade union tradition like Sweden is facing a push for an increase in its working week. The trend of working time extension is accompanied by a push for more flexibility. In sum, one can say that either from the micro level (when one looks to ones or its family and friends reality) to the macro level, increase in working time, flexibility of working time and precarious contracts regarding time are a trend in Europe and in the whole world. With this concern in mind, this paper tries to investigate the working time and flexibilization *phenomena*.

1. Working day – absolute and relative surplus value extraction

Marx (1990) analyzes a capitalist production where labor (which is used in commodities production) creates value and the worker receives as wage only part of the value s/he produces. Therefore, under this analysis, the working day is composed by “(necessary labor-time)+(surplus labor-time)”. It means that the working day is composed by a certain number of hours that reflect the time necessary for the worker to produce his wage, hence every extra hour above the necessary labor is “surplus-labor”. The surplus-labor, or surplus value, is the origin of the capitalist profit.

From this derives the prime importance of the labor-process in capitalism because without it, there can be no surplus value and profit. Therefore, the importance of “value” in Marxian Political Economy lies in the fact that “value”, in a capitalist society, expresses the social relations (predominantly class ones) of capitalism. It is "immaterial but objective" (Marx, 1990), because it can only be approached when relations are established between people (we

relate to one another depending on what we produce and trade) (Harvey, 2006). Exchange value in Marxian Political Economy is the representation of value. All commodities entail use and exchange values but without the capitalist labor process, commodity does not really exist. In other words, the value is derived from the labor process.

The necessary labor-time and the surplus labor-time vary from country to country and time to time. There are two forms of increasing the surplus value: extending the length of the working day (absolute surplus value) or to shorten the necessary labor-time (relative surplus value). Marx also affirms that, in a capitalist economy, the length of the working day will always be longer than the necessary labor-time because that is where the profit comes from. (Marx, 1990)

Based on the definition above, one can conclude that the longer the working day the higher the worker exploitation in terms of absolute surplus-value, therefore the capitalist will always push to extend the working day as much as possible maintaining the wage level. Nonetheless, due to the fact that labor-power is a fictitious commodity (Marx, 1990; Jessop 1990, 2002, 2004) it cannot be exploited “ad infinitum”: the worker has physical limits that cannot be surpassed (although those limits are very elastic) and the worker has the relative power to limit the working day (and one cannot separate the labor-power from its seller). Marx (1990) summarizes the struggle between Capital and labor regarding the length of the working day as follows:

(...) apart from extremely elastic bounds, the nature of the exchange of commodities itself imposes no limit to the working-day, no limit to surplus-labor. The capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working-day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working-days out of one. On the other hand, the peculiar nature of the commodity sold implies a limit to its consumption by the purchaser, and the laborer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working-day to one of definite normal duration. There is here, therefore, an antinomy, right against right, both equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides. (Marx, 1990:344)

Hence, the determination of what is a working-day, presents itself as result of a struggle between collective capital - the class of capitalists -, and collective labor - the working-class.

There is also another form of surplus extraction, the “relative surplus-value”. Marx states that it consists in raising the productivity of the worker, reducing the necessary labor-time while also keeping the length of the working day. To achieve this goal, Capital uses two mechanisms: dead Capital (machinery) and techniques to organize production, such as Taylorism to the modern forms of pressuring the worker to be more productive. Several of those forms are connected to flexibilization and they will be discussed further in this article.

The objective of the development of the productivity of labor within the context of capitalist production is the shortening of that part of the working day

in which the worker must work for himself, and the lengthening, thereby, of the part of the day in which he is free to work for nothing for the capitalist. (Marx, 1990: 438).

Marx also highlights that relative surplus-value can be extracted by “usurpation of part of the domain of necessary labor-time” meaning that if the wage is pushed below what would be necessary for the worker’s reproduction, the capitalist will also extract more relative surplus, maintaining the duration of the working day (Ibid: 431).

2. Working time - historical development

The allocation of time between social and economic reproduction changed considerably with the introduction of the capitalist production based on property rights. When workers lost the possession of the means of production and land became a private commodity (Miller, 2001), they were submitted to a commercial relationship in which the sale of their labor-power became systemically necessary as their only means of living: a hidden socio-economic coercion impels workers’ proletarianization. Marx (1990) states that there are some conditions that must be fulfilled in order for labor power to become a commodity. The first condition is that the worker has to be free hence he should only sell a limited period of his labor-power and not sell himself as a slave and the second is “(...) that the possessor of labor-power instead of being able to sell commodities in which his labor has been objectified, must rather be compelled to offer for sale as a commodity that very labor-power” (Marx, 1990:272). However, he still has ownership of his time which gives him some power. Therefore, working time became an important struggle between Capital and labor and these power relations play an important role in determining the length of the working day. Historically, workers have been fighting for a reduction of the length of the working day, week, year and life; the right to paid Sundays and holidays; and a reduction of night work. Those reductions are always the result of labor struggle and Capital has always tried to avoid it or when implemented, to reverse the trend.

Some examples of this development start from mid-1840's when the working day settled was 10 hours in England and France (Silva et Al., 2009). However, in the mid-1850's the British capitalists toppled the law and the length of the working day went back to 12 hours a day. Although the call for 8 hours working day started to be demanded by U.S workers in 1866 (Marx, 1990), twenty years later the working day was still of 16 hours. Strikes and demonstrations calling for reduction of working time took place. In 1st May, 1886 there was a great mobilization demanding a reduction of the working day to 8 hours and some cities adopted it. In 1919, the first International Labor Organization (ILO) convention, ratified by 52 countries, limited the working day to 8 hours and 48 hours per week. In France, a pro-workers

government adopted in 1936 the 40-hour working week and two weeks holiday per year. The US, in the crisis of 1929, used the "New Deal" policy, based on the Keynesian paradigm, to reduce working time, create jobs and activate the economy by raising aggregate demand. The workers struggles, in general, were successful and the limits regarding working time determined by law reflected in the reality, the reduction of actual working hours can be observed in table 1.

The aim of improving working time regulation and reducing working time was intensified and, in part, achieved during the Fordist era. On one hand, the mode of production imposed by the assembly line required a disciplined work force. Consequently, a rigid working time regime was necessary. On the other hand, the labor force was empowered and through collective bargaining with Capital and through political pressure within the State, they could obtain regulation. In many cases, this resulted in the direct reduction of the working time as can be observed on table 1.

The macroeconomic context from the 1980's on, on the other hand, was not favorable for labor in general. Low growth and stagnation were problems faced by several European countries and consequently unemployment rates increased, creating the problem of stagflation, alongside structural unemployment. Additionally, constant technological innovations, as well as mergers and acquisitions, contributed to massive worker layoffs. The focus on the supply side forced companies to adapt to constant fluctuations in demand and therefore reduce production costs, which explains the choice for flexibility. Also, the shift from manufacturing to services pushes companies to increase their availability (extending opening hours, opening on weekends and so on) in order to meet customers needs. According to Krein (2007) flexibility seeks to lower contracting cost and bureaucracy, to adapt to demand fluctuations, lower risk, higher productivity and intensifying the use of variable and fixed capital. Companies, seeking to reduce their commitments regarding their workforce, try to implement and deepen all sorts of flexibility (contract, working time and wages).

Although the changes in the scenario date back to the 1980s, the impact that neoliberal policy has had on working time arrangement is observed more deeply from the 1990s onwards. Still, it is important to recognize that the discussion in the end of 1990s is very different from the current discussion. By comparing two books both published by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), the first *New Paths in Working Time Policy* by Boulin and Hoffmann (1999) and the second, *Collective bargaining on working time: Recent European experiences* by Keune (2006), one can realize a drastic shift on the debate regarding working time. The first book discusses reduction of working time and new arrangements like

part-time (voluntary), paid-leave models and flexible retirement schedules, all focused on the maxima used by Gorz (1967): “working less so all can work”. Hence, one can observe that even in a scenario not so favorable for labor, with considerably high levels of unemployment, the debate was around the reduction of working time. The later book argues that the low economic growth (or in some cases the jobless economic growth), the rise in unemployment rates, the consolidation of the neoliberal ideas, the decline in trade union membership and the intense competition within European Union weakened Trade Union negotiation power. As a result, trade union are pushed to accept a more intense utilization of flexible schedules and the implementation of new types of flexible working time arrangements, most of them harmful to labor.

The push for flexibilization and decentralization is Capital driven (Hyman, 2001; Keune, 2006). Keune also draws attention to the fact that working time flexibility (WTF) can be either State-led or negotiated on collective bargaining. On the other hand, trade unions are required to accept it as an attempt to avoid dismissals or other losses. Following the competitive corporatism idea, Trade Unions moderate their goals concerning wages, rights and benefits in order to contribute to the company competitiveness and productivity level, so to contribute to keep their jobs. But, according to Villanueva (2004), accepting flexibility does not necessarily imply greater security in employment. As mentioned above, Villanueva (2004) and Keune (2006) highlight that in the current discussion, reduction of working time - workers historical struggle - has been left behind and only in some case accepted by employees in exchange for concession regarding WTF. On the Graph 1, one can see that the average hours worked per year continue dropping. However, by comparing it to the increase in part-time work illustrated by Graph 2, one realizes that in reality what is observed is a more uneven division of work and not necessarily decrease of working hours. This fact is worsen by the data reveled by Graph 3 where one can notice that this increase in part-time work is due to an increase in involuntary part-time.

Additionally, in Europe, the flexibilization of working time (contract and wages as well) is an objective of the European Single Market Project since it follows the neoclassical assumption that the more flexible the labor marker, the higher the employment level. Weakened by the context and by their strategic choice of corporatist involvement, trade unions are taking a defensive approach, trying to hold on to the achievements of previous decades.

3. Working time flexibility

In this article, working time flexibility refers to arrangements regarding working time that go beyond the “traditional” working days (Monday to Friday/Saturday morning) and “traditional” working hours (from 8/9 am to 5/6pm). Those arrangements go from old forms of extension of the working day like overtime to new forms of flexible arrangements such as the “Zero Hour” contract.

It is acknowledged that in some cases WTF are inherent to the production activity such as in health services or other community service sectors, or some kind of industries that require continuous processes, for example the chemical industry due to the nature of the industrial process it can be stopped in the evening and restarted in the morning. However, this current increase in WTF seems to be profit driven and not so concerned with providing goods and services for the community². The flexibilization of working time thus would follow this tendency.

This paper provides definitions about the most common and most-used kinds of flexible working time, divided into two categories: working time flexibility and flexible contracts regarding working time. The aim is to define several types of flexibility and show how they function in general, as well as what their purposes, discursive-bases, and outcomes are.

3.1. Overtime - Overtime has been, historically, the most utilized way to increase working time. It should be used only in exceptional cases but it has been widely employed in high demand periods as a way to avoid having to hire new workers. The compensation mentioned by Eurofound frequently is (or should be) the hour/wage plus an additional percentage.

Overtime work is work performed by an employee in excess of the normal hours of work which has been officially requested and approved by management. It is work that is not part of an employee's regularly scheduled working week and for which an employee may be compensated (Eurofound, 2009).

Because the necessary working time was already performed by the worker, the surplus working time will increase during the overtime. It is unlikely that the capitalist will not have any profit, therefore, even if the overtime is paid proportionally to the wage as well as an included wage bonus, as it is unlikely that the worker will receive an amount that truthfully covers the labor-effort extolled in the additional working period. Therefore, the overall exploitation of the worker's labor-power will have increased.

² Rather, it follows the major capitalist goal, where money is invested to produce a commodity to sell it for money plus - “M-C-M” (Ibid: 247-257) or “buying in order to sell (...) the end and the beginning are the same, money or exchange-value, and this very fact makes the movement an endless one” (Ibid: 252) in which the drive to increase surplus value is preeminent.

In a non-full employment context, overtime contributes to polarization and to an increase in what Marx termed the industrial reserve army³, since it allows the capitalist to avoid hiring new workers. Overtime leads to polarization of the working class because on one hand there are workers working longer hours and on the other hand there are workers working few hours (involuntary part-time) or unemployed. It creates further divisions because the aims of those who have work can be conflicting from those unemployed.

The following types of WTF (from 3.2 to 3.5) are flexible working time schedules, regarding distribution of working time throughout the day, week and year. “There were many ways of varying time flexibility, both in the context of a full-time regular working week and outside of it” (Wallace, 2003: 784). Arrangements like flexible schedules, annual hour regimes and time account/bank of hours are similar in their purpose, use, and, what is more important for this analysis, they bring about the same major outcomes. In theory, they all aim to give more freedom to companies and workers regarding the distribution of time during the week, month and year. The agreements and the definitions found in the literature are very unclear regarding it, and principally on the issue of who decides the distribution of hours. An example of how broad and unclear those agreements are, can be observed on the Eurofound definition regarding annual working time:

AH (annualized hours) may be implemented in many ways and its introduction is usually associated with the existence of a consensus between the relevant social partners to amend the established norms for regulating working time (...). ‘Annualization’ or ‘annualized hours’ schemes allow employees’ working time (and pay) to be calculated and scheduled over a period of a year (or some other period longer than a week, if a broad definition is used)’ (...) None of the countries examined have specific legislation providing in explicit terms for the annualization of working time, or providing a definition of such annualization. (Eurofound, 2003).

The argument that this paper will develop draws attention to that, under a Marxian perspective, one cannot assume that the same procedure could be beneficial for both classes (labor and Capital) because power relations play a heavy role. Capital has been historically stronger than labor and nowadays the scenario is even more unfavorable to labor, and as such, workers have been pushed to accept this kind of flexibilization (Bieler, Lindberg, and Pillay, 2008; Silver, 2003). The situation gets even worse when a worker has to negotiate individually - if as a class worker has less structural power, individually, a worker has almost no negotiation power at all, problem more or less deep considering the unemployment and the

³ Global reserve army of labor – Since capital is considered as a globally expansive relation, the working force should be considered that as well, therefore, if there is unemployment in any country it contributes to the industrial reserve army, and consequently to the disempowerment of the working class.

level of decommodification⁴ provided by one's Welfare State⁵ - and it happens frequently in this kind of arrangements. Wallace (2003), in a compared work regarding eight countries, states the following regarding the control over flexible hours:

It was the employer who mainly controlled the hours of work in the Accession countries and also in the UK— this was the case for half or more than half of the respondents in each country. In Sweden and the Netherlands people were more likely to state that they control the hours of work or that they decide together with their employers (Wallace 2003: 786).

So, it is questionable when a worker says that the control over the working hours is shared with the employer. Formal or informal pressure may play a role in this decision. Even when it is the worker who, in theory, decides when to work longer hours, the volume of work, - quite difficult to measure mainly in white-collar positions - informal pressure from the management, colleagues, self-pressure, all may press on the worker the need to work longer hours. Furthermore, because it is the worker who “decides” when to take time off, if the volume of work, the boss' or colleagues' pressure is too intense, the worker may not take it. Therefore, one can conclude that, apart from a few exceptions, these arrangements give more room to companies to dispose the working force according to their needs and workers are subjugated in those processes, having to accept more employer control of their lifetime.

These kinds of arrangements present the same outcomes as overtime and others. First, when it increases the length of the working day and it does not pay extra for this overtime (the extra worked hours will be compensated by taking time off later) it results in more extraction of absolute surplus value. Following this argumentation it is important to highlight that the Eurofound definition about overtime does not specify that overtime has to be paid but merely compensated, which may be seen as a way to subtly change the public perception about the issue, contributing to the acceptance to this kind of flexibilization.

Second, within the duration of the working day there are so called “no working moments”. Porous moments called by Marx (1990) like breaks or when “fraudulent” workers take longer than necessary time to start or to turn off the machines. The same is even more noticeable when one considers white-collar workers, the volume of work may vary and the breaks and “social relations” within a company are part of the “game”. When a worker takes his/her extra hours/days off (there are regulations that oblige companies to compensate the “time account” within a certain period) it is not necessarily true that the volume of work is lower, or low enough so his/her absence may lead to condensation of work in a second moment in which the

⁴ See more regarding “Decommodification” in Esping-Andersen, (1990).

⁵ Regarding the strength of an individual worker, the author continues by stating that men are more likely to be able to decide on their hours than women, older workers more than younger workers, those with better education more than those with lower education, higher income groups more than lower income groups.

same amount of work has to be done in less hours the company eliminates porous hour, changing dead time in work effectively (Marx, 1990). This process intensifies work and leads to an increase in relative labor-surplus extraction.

Third, it helps to increase the reserve army. Fourth, it may harm the worker's work-life balance. One's relation with her/his family and society may be jeopardized because the company determines compensation of hours and it may be on a weekend when the worker may be deprived from his family's company or social life. Extended working hours may cause physical and psychological diseases.

3.2. Flexible working hours –This system allows the companies to adjust the working week or month, decreasing or increasing the working hours, according to the demand in the period. They can have working weeks with 28 hours and others with 48 hours for example. Hence, when the demand is low the company can save hours for use during a high demand period.

3.3. Annualized hours - It is nearly the same as the previous type but the working time is scheduled over a year which gives greater freedom (to companies, and arguably to workers) to use workers time. It “has been promoted by EU policy and recommendations” (Kouzis and Kretsos, 2003), so it reinforces the statement that this is a Capital driven form of flexibilization.

3.4. Time accounts or bank of hours – These accounts function as a substitute for overtime. It is a formal process whereby one takes time off to compensate for extra time worked, or vice-versa. Usually there are limits to credited and debited hours agreed on through collective bargaining or established by law to prevent the accumulation of too many hours that may turn into too long absence periods or long periods of overtime.

3.5. Flexitime – This is an individual arrangement where the worker has freedom to choose when to start and finish her/his working day. For example, one may start working at either 8:00am or 9:00am and finish, respectively, at 4:00pm or 5:00pm, respecting the stipulated working hours. An ideological applicability of this kind of flexibility is to convince ordinary people that this is the arrangement that one talks about when one refers to WFT and therefore all of these forms are good for workers. Nevertheless, empirical data shows that this is not a representative kind of the WFT and that it has been implemented as mentioned before mostly for skilled workers in some key industries and specific countries.

3.6. Shift work – Some kinds of industries require continuous production and essential services (health, fire fighters, armed forces, telecommunication systems, hospitality industry) which need to be continuous as well, in those cases shift work is valid.

Shift work involves a regular work schedule during which an enterprise is operational or provides services beyond the normal working hours and where different crews of workers succeed each other at the same work site to perform the same operations. Shift work usually involves work in the early morning, at night or at the weekend; the weekly rest days might not coincide with the normal rest days (Eurofound, 2009).

Shift work is extremely harmful to workers as they have their time completely deregulated and available to the company, and therefore they can not adequately plan other activities within a fixed schedule.

Night work, as at present practiced, always cause fatigue, and also in many cases, a psychosomatic occupational disorder (neuroses and digestive ulcers) to which the practice of rotation (shift work) can add specific digestion disorders. (...) Again, night work disturbs family and social life (Carpentier and Cazamian 1990: 68)

Capital aims to extract the maximum utilization of dead capital⁶ to increase labor exploitation and productivity. 24-hour processes in manufacturing industries can be observed since the invention of electricity allows production to continue all day and night. Some regulations regarding shift/night work were implemented during the Fordist phase aiming to restrict continuous production and services only to cases when they would be absolutely necessary (cases mentioned before). Nevertheless, nowadays there is a trend where industries and services are increasing working/opening hours in order to extract as much as possible from labor and increase fixed Capital utilization or, for services, to provide it for longer hours.

3.7. Work on Sundays and holidays – as mentioned in shift work, there are some kinds of industries that require work on Sunday and public holidays. However, manufacturing, and especially commerce and service provision have started to work on Sundays and holidays. According to Dedecca (2004: 27) the transformation of consumption in leisure encourages the opening of stores on Sundays and holidays: the so called “core workers⁷” who have well paid jobs that usually do not require Sunday work, appreciated the fact that they can shop on their days off. On the other hand, workers employed in shopping malls, supermarkets and other branches of the service economy are against weekend work because they are the ones adversely affected by it. In this sense, it also polarizes the labor force, and even questions working class consciousness and solidarity.

The entrepreneurs’ explanation to defend work on Sundays is based on two points: it would increase profits and create jobs. In the case of services and commerce, Pastore (1997, 2005) affirms that if stores open on Sundays and holidays they will increase sales and profits, however Kerin (2007) and Miranda (2005) refute the idea. Based on Keynesian economic

⁶ Constant Capital / Dead Labor - Capitalist’s outlay of money on fixed assets, raw material, incidental costs, ancillary operating costs; Variable Capital / Live Labor - capital outlay on labor costs (i.e. the wages paid to workers).

⁷ This work applies the concept of core and periphery workers found in Pillay 2006.

principal, the marginal propensity to consume of an individual will only increase if its income does, thus, the fact that commerce will be open on Sundays only changes the day that people will buy but it does not increase their spending, because it does not increase their income.

Considering the hypothesis that Sunday and holiday work would increase jobs, in fact, in countries where the Sunday and holiday work is allowed, it can be observed that it did not create jobs since Capital reorganizes the labor force to meet its new needs – using other forms of WTF like overtime for example – or even forces a change in the legislation to avoid new hiring's. But if commerce is allowed to open on Sundays, it may even eliminate jobs in small business because family businesses may be not able to follow such extensive opening hours.

3.8. Work on scale system - Various types of scale systems are used by companies such as 5x1 (five working days followed by 1 day off), six (days) x 1 (day) or 12x36 (twelve working hours for thirty six hours off) among others. These kinds of patterns also affect the social life of the worker and her/his family. The long uninterrupted days observed in this kind of scale, such as the "12x36", exposes the worker to long hours of continuous activity and may harm his/her health or even cause accidents at work due to fatigue and lack of concentration. The worker also does not receive overtime or any kind of compensation, even if he works more than 8 hours/day, therefore it is a way to extend working time and therefore surplus working time. By allowing a single worker to work longer, it also avoids contracting new workers, maintaining the reserve army level or even increasing it.

3.9. Part-time job contracts or part-time job agreements (Flexible contracts regarding time) - There are two different kinds of part-time work, voluntarily and involuntarily. Eurofund (2009) indicates that part-time, in general, has increased in Europe in the last 20 years. This institute presents a very classless explanation about this discussion mentioning that part-time work might be part of “a political decision to promote part-time work, particularly in countries suffering from high unemployment”. It adds that, “for workers, it may offer the chance of a better balance between working life and family responsibilities, training, leisure or civic activities”. For employers, it permits greater flexibility and productivity gains. “For policy-makers (...) part-time work may reduce the number of jobseekers or, at least, the number of people registered as such”. It also emphasizes some disadvantages of part-time work: “hourly wages are lower; they are ineligible for certain social benefits; and their career prospects are more limited.” (Eurofound, 2009). People that decided to work part time voluntarily are often part of a couple where both work, so the limited income is not a problem because together they can compose a living salary for the family. However, if one has to take a part-time job involuntarily it is frequently a problem.

For the scope of this paper, some consequences regarding part-time work are very relevant. First, part-time work intensifies work. Marx states that by citing “the self-evident law that the efficiency of labor-power is in inverse ratio to the duration of its expenditure” (1990: 535) meaning that the less the worker works the more productive s/he is. It is noteworthy to underline that this result comes from either voluntary or involuntary part-time work. On the other hand, part-time work, mainly involuntary, is synonymous for precarious work, from this point the next outcomes derive.

Second, as commented above, part time work may not pay enough, so “surplus labor would in this case be prolonged only by transgressing its normal limits; its domain would be extended only by a usurpation of part of the domain of necessary labor-time” (Ibid 431). So in this case not even the reproduction of the labor force is assured. Capital can do that only with part of the labor force; otherwise they would face a labor shortage soon. However, since lately the reserve army is quite high they can just push part of the population to a situation of misery, well outlined by Marx in his theory of immiseration (Capital Vol. 1, 1990).

From this point, one can go to the third outcome: the polarization of the working class. The existence of full-time, voluntary part-time, involuntary part-time and unemployed workers per se is an example of how this category of contracting contributes to fragmentation of the workers' identities and class positions, creating different classes of workers.

Forth, it is common to have a part-time contract connected to other forms of precarious contract, for instance temporary contract. In this case, the contract will present the worse conditions to the worker; as he will be poorly paid, with little or no benefits, and minimal or no security. This work advocates that all sorts of precarious work will automatically push the worker to work more intensively, because s/he would believe (the discourse will make s/he believes) that working hard will help oneself to keep his/her job. This obviously will lead to more absolute and relative surplus extraction and create a redundancy of labor, increasing the reserve army.

Last, considering travel time as working time (unpaid work), Villanueva (2004) argues that this time would be the same in a full-time or part-time job so, those workers who have a part-time job will “work” more unpaid hours proportionally, thus it means that surplus extraction in comparison with full-time will be higher.

3.10. Fixed term contract (Flexible contracts regarding time) – According to ETUC, UNICE and CEEP, the definition of a

fixed-term worker is a person having a contract of employment or relationship entered into directly between an employer and a worker, where the end of the employment contract or relationship is determined by objective conditions such

as reaching a specific date, completing a specific task, or the occurrence of a specific event. (Eurofound, 2009).

However, this form of hiring is becoming very common even out of this framework, exempting the company to have a long term employment contract with the worker, and consequently the obligations this would imply. Therefore, labor becomes cheaper, easy to dismiss and the worker is unsecured. For fixed-term contracts, an important issue is how many of such contracts an employer can offer to a worker before s/he is offered an open-ended contract: there are regulations about this issue and they vary from country to country. Even when those rules exist, it is relatively simple to break them, showing the discrepancy between labor legislative enactment and concrete labor market regulation (Portes, 1994a, 1994b). S/he will feel pressured into working harder to ensure that her/his contract is renewed, therefore, first the worker may work longer (extend the working time) and more intensively, diminishing the need of new hiring, and therefore, contributing to the maintenance of the reserve army level. It also fragments the working class.

3.11. Temporary agency work (Flexible contracts regarding time) – It is defined by Eurofound (2009) as: “a temporary employment relationship between a temporary work agency, which is the employer and a worker, where the latter is assigned to work for, and under the control of an undertaking and/or establishment making use of his or her services (the user company).” This type of job is even more precarious and unsecured in comparison with fixed-term and usually badly paid.

3.12. Zero hour (Flexible contracts regarding time) - In this arrangement, the employer does not guarantee a fixed number of hours per week to the worker; rather, he is expected to be “on call” and receive compensation only for worked hours. For the worker it results in a highly unsecured work relation and a high degree of uncertainty considering her/his level of income and time as well, with either too much or too little work. Apart from this, in this case it is also worth mentioning the words of Marx (1990: 534) who said: “The denser hour of the ten hours’ working-day contains more labor, i.e., expended labor-power, than the more porous hour of the twelve hours’ working-day”. With this quote, this paper wants to underline that when the worker is called and paid only when necessary, the intensity implied in this kind of work is quite high. Because the worker will need to satisfy his employer every time s/he is called with the hope to be called again, it can be a reason for the intensification of work as well.

It also is a way to avoid permanent contracts and polarize the labor force. The European working time directive “introduced the new category of ‘on-call time’ in addition to working time and rest periods. The proposal differentiates between “on-call” time – the period during

which a worker must be available to work – and the inactive part of “on-call” time – the period when a worker who is on call is not actually carrying out his or her duties. The inactive part of on-call time should not constitute working time within the meaning of the directive” (Eurofound, 2009). This paper argues that when a worker sells his/her labor-power s/he is also selling her/his time and availability. Therefore the time that the worker is available for the company has to be considered and paid as working time, if the company uses it or not.

4. Collective outcomes

Most of the research conducted about WTF analyzes its effects on individual workers, some of them focusing on its advantages and others focusing on its disadvantages (Ennals, 2001). The ones that highlight the good outcomes currently connect flexitime with flexicurity⁸, or a kind of flexible time model applied in the Scandinavian countries focus on its benefits and advocating that would be possible to transfer this kind of arrangements to other realities (Giddens, 2007).

Regarding those positions, this paper acknowledged that, for some workers – even if only in an individualistic and short term perspective - mostly for skilled workers (core labor force) and in some countries more than in others, can WTF be beneficial. Wallace (2003) in a comparison regarding flexibilization in eight European countries, highlights: “In most places (countries) flexitime was associated with higher incomes, so we could say that it was a privileged kind of working schedule” while the same work states that “We can assume that having a regular schedule was a privileged situation in most countries” (:782).

Therefore, the authors are skeptical of the positive approaches regarding WTF, considering them either naïve – because they do not reflect on the broader implications that WTF have for the working class, - or they are politically driven, being part of a capitalist discourse that spreads a pro-flexibilization idea, by taking exceptions – core workers from highly developed welfare system’s countries that do benefit from WTF – as rules in order to push forward their aims. The part regarding labor market on the Lisbon Agenda⁹ and the European directives regarding flexibility are examples of this last type.

On the other hand, some studies draw attention to the processes of precarization that flexibilization of working time brings to labor and the effects that long working hours or an

⁸“The concept of the golden triangle is that the success of the Danish employment system is due to its unique combination of flexibility (measured by a high level of job mobility), social security (a generous system of social welfare and unemployment benefits) and active labor market programs, all of which support the ongoing transformation of the economy.” (Madsen, 2002:4)

⁹ The Lisbon Treaty – neoclassical/neoliberal - enforces the need of a flexible labor market in order to have a competitive Europe and as a measure to fight unemployment. The good example of flexibility is flexicurity and with this slogan, the European Union project pushes forward for all kinds of flexibility.

unstable schedule or on an unsecured contract have over workers life, health and life-family balance (Caruso et al, 2004, Van der Hulst, 2003 Ennals, 2001).

This work intends to emphasize the collective outcomes that WTF has and its impact on the workers as a class: for the majority of workers and above all, for the working class, working time flexibility brings innumerable disadvantages and the biggest aim and result of it is to increase workers' exploitation.

Every kind of flexibility of working time analyzed above encompasses at least one of those five broader outcomes, actually they always comprise more than one, since one is consequence of or an aggravate to another.

4.1. Extension – Absolute surplus value extraction: Some types of WTF extend the working day. This paper defines working time in Marxist terms: “(surplus working-time)+(necessary working-time)” (Marx, 1990). The hours above the necessary ones are the absolute surplus value or the capitalist profit. If real wages increase by the same percentage as productivity then, *ceteris paribus*, the relation between necessary labor and surplus labor remains the same and any increase in labor time (or intensification) will increase the surplus labor time. Considering that the wages did not increase above the productivity in the last three decades years (except between 2001-2003) as can be observed in the Graph 4, the capitalist production increased the “surplus working-time”, intensifying worker's exploitation and surplus value extraction.

Marx (1990: 376-377) states that “By extending the working day, therefore, capitalist production, which is essentially the production of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus labor (...) extends the worker's production-time within a given period by shortening his life”. By shortening of life Marx meant that an increase in working time would result in premature death of the worker, nowadays this correlation still exists (stress and psychological diseases that might lead to a lack of attention and cause accidents at workplace or physical diseases like heart problems). On the other hand, one can stress the change on the idea of work, the role is inverted now, instead of working to gain the means of living people are living for work and this is a mismatch produced by the society.

4.2. Intensification - Relative surplus value extraction: There are three ways to intensify work: First, through the introduction of new machinery; Second, by reorganizing production; Third, by putting pressure on workers to work more within the same limit of time. The last examples are related with several types of WTF. Regarding the second, flexible arrangements are examples when Capital eliminates “porous times” within the working day, compressing the length of the day when demand is low and utilizing the “saved” hours when it is

necessary, avoiding overtime and new hiring. Part-time is also a form to condense work because the less hours one works the more productive s/he is. Referring to the third form, there are various ways to pressure workers, and this work will emphasize some that are connected to another outcome brought for many types of WTF, insecurity.

The advantage of this form of surplus extraction is that it is more obscure, therefore, the increase in exploitation is more difficult to be realized by the workers. As a worsen factor, unfortunately there is no good measurement for intensification. Consequently, this is easier to push forward and that is why the forms of flexibility that grows lately are related to intensification of work.

4.3. Insecurity: precarious contracts intensification-extension of work: This is an outcome derived mainly from the form of flexible contract, temporary, agency - some (more likely involuntary) part-time contracts that are temporary or via agency - and zero hour contracts are by its purpose a precarious work meaning that their advantage for the capitalist is to be able to fire the workers more easier and without costs. It reflects on a very unsecured situation for the worker and an important tool for the employer to overexploit this more fragile worker. As mentioned before, work is not an option but a need and to keep a job, having a job is a constant preoccupation for the workers. In order to keep a job or have a precarious contract renewed, a precarious worker may overdo the “normal” work. This “extra” that s/he would do to impress/satisfy the employer may be translated into extension of working time (many times not paid overtime). Alternatively, in a bad work situation the employer can demand the extension and or intensification of work. One can conclude that an unsecured job may lead to overexploitation, leading to more and more intense work, which obviously harms the worker’s life and as well will lead to our next outcome.

4.4. Increase of the industrial reserve army: This outcome derives from the three first ones. The increase in working time and intensification of work reduce the necessity of hiring, therefore reinforces the reserve army. Capital is frequently rethinking the labor process and producing technology to decrease the necessity of labor. In *Reviews of Capital*, Engels, 1867 summarizes Marx definition about the function of the reserve army:

when business is bad or middling, (the reserve army) is paid *below* the value of its labor and is irregularly employed or is left to be cared for by public charity, but which is indispensable to the capitalist class at times when business is especially lively, as is palpably evident in England--but which *under all circumstances* serves to break the power of resistance of the regularly employed workers and to keep their wages down. (Engels, 1867)

The last sentence reveals why the concept is relevant for this study since it considers that the new varieties of working time arrangements intend to increase the extension of working

time and intensity of work - extraction of absolute and relative surplus value, respectively - and the use of constant Capital (Marx, 1990) and doing so labor will become redundant, the industrial reserve army will increase. The larger the reserve army, the bigger the threat it represents to workers. This is another tool that Capital uses against labor, the replacement threat is either spread around by the communication system indirectly or directly by intimidation.

In this sense, it is worth to highlight that although some workers benefit individually from WTF, a large reserve army brings will affect them as well: First, the existence and even more the increase on the reserve army will push all wages down; second, it may work as an intimidation tool even for core worker; third, it creates social instability.

4.5. Polarization : This work defines polarization as the division that some forms of WTF incite in the working class. Two factors will be considered regarding polarization: first, the uneven division of labor and income in the society; and second, the fragmentation that different types of jobs with different kinds of contract, remuneration and importance (core and periphery) bring to the labor movements goals and mobilization strategies.

With so many forms of flexibilization that imply different quantities of working hours, some workers work too long, others work few hours – in a great extent, sacrificing their necessary labor and not making enough to live (involuntary part-time) - and others are unemployed. It generates an unfair division of labor and income as well. In many societies when the distribution of work and income is very uneven, it may cause social instability: When the production process requires fewer workers and distributes fewer wages, the social stability is in danger (Gorz, 1990).

The second point this paper underlines the division among the working class created by all those kinds of WTF.

So-called ‘fragmentation of the labor force’ in Europe has resulted from the recent increase in forms of work and employment which differ from the ‘standard employment relationship’ of permanent, full-time, socially secure employment. Complementing the standard form of employment are the growth of part-time work, fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, homeworking, self-employment, casual, seasonal and other ‘non-standard’ forms of employment. (Eurofound, 2009)

The divergence of goals between “core and periphery” workers is evident for instance when a trade union has to negotiate about dismissals. Between full time and temporary workers, the later are the ones who will lose their jobs. This is only one example but the rule is that core workers have not much in common with precarious ones, so it is very difficult to find a common ground for the working class struggle.

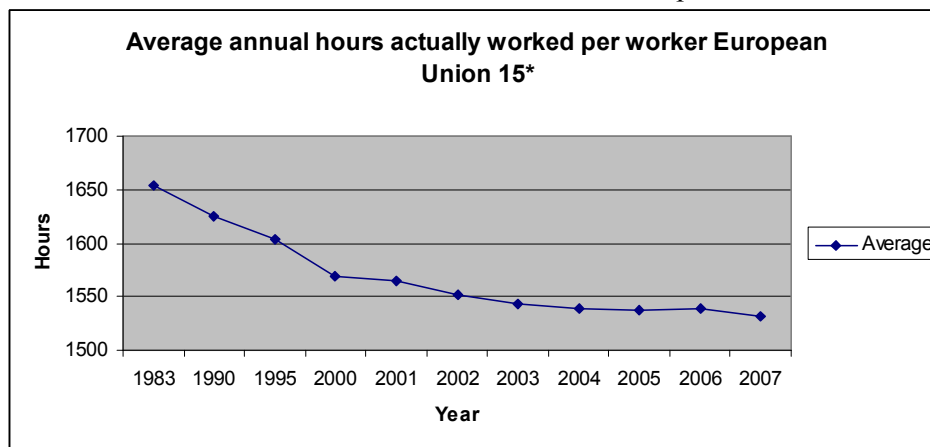
5. Final remarks

In order to make some final remarks, it is necessary to return to the research question: How flexibilization of working time affects the working class and how far corporatist systems have been able to defend workers against it? We come to the conclusion that **the flexibilization of working time affects the working class negatively**. The collective outcomes highlighted along the work¹⁰, such as extension of working time, intensification of work, insecurity, polarization and increase of the industrial reserve army show that working time flexibility increases workers exploitation because it increases working time or intensifies it, or both. Even when a particular portion within the working class (core and skilled workers) may benefit from some kind of flexibility, it polarizes the working class, weakening it.

The authors would like to stress three points. First, the working time flexibility is a Capital driven process and it brings negative outcomes to the majority of workers and to the working class. Secondly, the classless perspective that has been adopted by labor movements across the world should be questioned and social partnership should not be seen as the highest level the workers can reach. Therefore, (third) the labor movement should go back to the roots to understand the workers' position within capitalism (the exploited) and develop an ideology that free labor from this condition

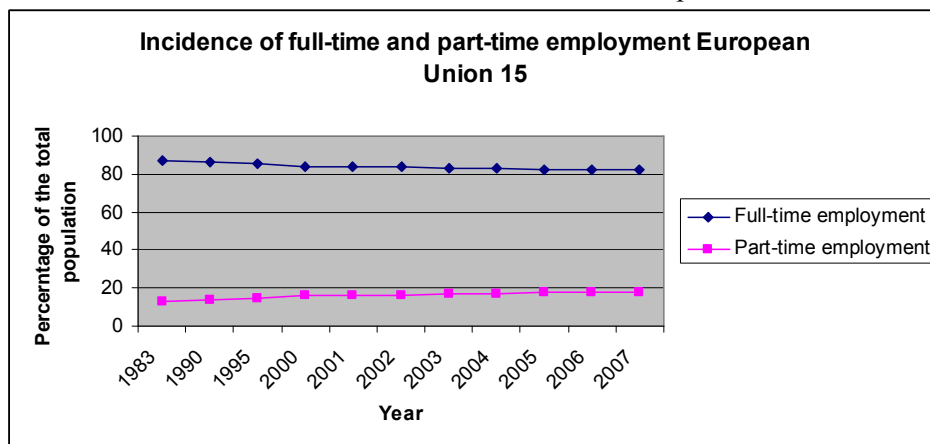
¹⁰ The types of flexibility and its outcomes are summarized in tables 2 and 3.

Graph 1



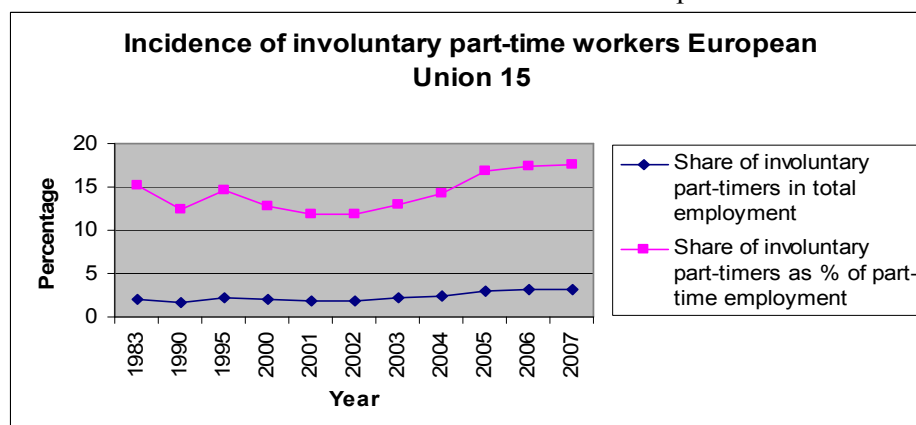
Austria was omitted due to lack of data. 1983-1990 - West Germany
 Source: Own composition with data extracted from OECD.Stat, 2009

Graph 2



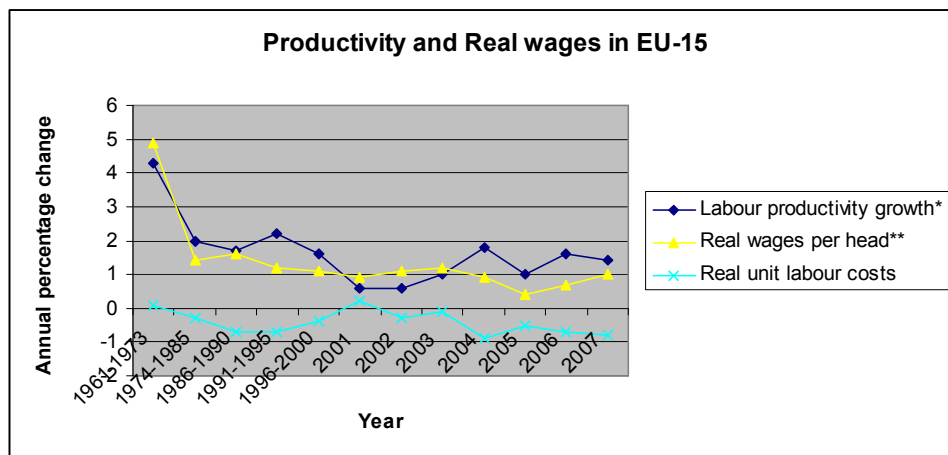
Source: Own composition with data extracted from OECD.Stat, 2009

Graph 3



Source: Own composition with data extracted from OECD.Stat, 2009

Graph 4



Former EU-15, *1961-91: including West-Germany, ** Private consumption deflator
Source: own composition with data from Statistical Annex of European Economy, 2007

Table 1
Average annual hours actually worked per worker
countries

Year					
Country	1870	1913	1938	1950	1970
Austria	2.935	2.58	2.312	1.976	1.848
Belgium	2.964	2.605	2.267	2.283	1.986
France	2.945	2.588	1.848	1.989	1.888
Germany	2.941	2.584	2.316	2.316	1.907
Holland	2.964	2.605	2.244	2.208	1.910
Italy	2.886	2.536	1.927	1.997	1.768
Sweden	2.945	2.588	2.204	1.951	1.660
UK	2.984	2.624	2.267	1.958	1.735
USA	2.964	2.605	2.062	1.867	1.707

Source: Table partially extracted from Silva et Al. in Bosch, Dawkins and Michon (1994: 8).
* referred to year 1978

Table 2

Flexible working time	Definition	Discourse	Reality	Broader implications
Overtime	Work performed by an employee in excess of the normal hours of work.	Used as an exception. Worker can make a bit extra money.	Used to avoid new hiring.	1, 4, 5
Flexible working hours	Companies can adjust the working week/month, decreasing or increasing the working hours, according to the demand.	Worker can take free time whenever they choose or can coordinate it with employer.	The employer decides when the worker can take time of.	1, 2, 4, 5
Annualized hours	Working time is scheduled over a year what gives greater freedom (to companies) to use workers time.	Worker can take free time whenever they choose or can coordinate it with employer.	The employer decides when the worker can take time of.	1, 2, 4, 5
Time accounts or bank of hours	It is a substitute for overtime, is a formal process on one takes time off to compensate extra time worked, or the other way around.	Worker can take free time whenever they choose or can coordinate it with employer and can have a better use of his/her time.	Informal or formal pressure from the management, colleagues, self-pressure and volume of work play a role about when to work more and when (if) take time off.	1, 2, 4, 5
Flexitime arrangements	Individual arrangements where the worker has freedom to choose within a time band where to start and finish her/his working day.	This is Flexibilization. It is positive for the workers.	Few cases and mostly only core workers can enjoy this flexibility.	1, 2, 4, 5 Used as "propaganda" to spread the idea of "good" flexibilization but empirical data shows that kind of flexibility is reality only for a small (core) part of the labor force.
Shift work	Work beyond the normal working day/hours (Monday to Friday from 8/0am to 5/6pm).	Remaining competitive/providing a 24/7 service to meet customer needs	Customer demand does not increase; anti-social working hours; night shifts also have health implications.	4, 5
Scale	Various types of scale are used by companies: 5x1 (five working days + 1 day off), 6 (days) x 1 (day) or 12x36 (twelve working hours for thirty-six hours off).	Company needs.	Anti-social working hours, and health dangers due to long shifts. Shift like 12x36, if wages are low gives "occasion" to worker take a second job harming even more workers health.	1, 4, 5

Weekend work	Work on weekends and public holidays	Increased productivity and sales	Evidence that demand does not change; anti-social working hours.	1,4,5 and It reinforces consumer-culture.
Table 3				
Flexible contracts regarding time	Definition	Discourse	Reality	Broader implications
Part-time contracts	Working contract that implies less than 25 hours a week.	Worker can have a better work-life balance	Frequently is involuntary part time, which is precarious and pays insufficiently to assure workers subsistence.	2, 3, 4, 5 and Time spent travelling to and from work is proportionately greater.
Fixed term contract	A type of contract the previously determines the end of the employment relation.	The conditions that determine the end of the contract would be such as reaching a specific date, completing a specific task, or the occurrence of a specific event.	Used to hire unskilled labor cheaper than in a traditional contract	land 2 (likely), 3, 4, 5
Temporary agency work	A temporary employment relation between a temporary work agency, and a worker, where the latter is assigned to work for, another company.	Temporary and trained staff.	Used to hire unskilled labor cheaper than in a traditional contract	land 2 (likely), 3, 4, 5
Zero hour	The employer does not guarantee the employee a fixed number of hours per week; rather, the employee is expected to be on call and receive compensation only for worked hours.	Company needs; reliance on expert staff	Unpaid overtime, encroachment and disruption of free time, sense of "being owned" by the company	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

- 1 - Extension
- 2 - Intensification
- 3 - Insecurity
- 4 - Increases the Reserve army
- 5 - Polarization

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