

REFLECTIONS OF A CPTM WORKER – inside the São Paulo Metropolitan Train Company

This short text aims to systematize the impressions of a militant that has been thinking about resistance possibilities in his place of work: the railways under the administrations of the São Paulo Metropolitan Train Company (CPTM). It doesn't go as far as to present conclusions, but it reaches over the limits of being a simple account of the facts by debating issues connected to the possibilities of reforming a working-class movement for our present times.

CPTM: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

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By a Train Worker

Before getting into the reflections brought on by the attempts at organizing at the São Paulo Metropolitan Train Company (CPTM in its Portuguese initials), I believe a brief introduction to the organization and its particularities is necessary. Created in 1992 from the junction of the railway lines of old train companies operating in the Greater São Paulo region, the CPTM currently transports 2.7 million users a day and is 271km long, adding up to 7 lines and 94 stations through 23 cities (20 in the Greater São Paulo area and 3 at the Northwest region of the city). It employs 8,200 workers – 851 in its administration, 2560 in maintenance, 3864 in operations (including traffic) and 794 in security (according to the data presented to new workers).

Despite being a single company, CPTM presents very distinct realities inside itself, due to its being composed of railway lines originally belonging to different companies, each with their own history. The current lines 8 and 9 come from the old Sorocabana Railway Line, which had its first section built in 1870, from Sorocaba to São Paulo. In 1927, the section to Santos started construction, in an effort to break the São Paulo Railway monopoly. In 1971, those lines were taken over by FEPASA (Ferrovia Paulista S/A, another railway company) and later, in 1998, were incorporated to CPTM. Parts of the São Paulo – Sorocaba section became Line 8 (ending in Itapevi) and parts of the section to Santos became Line 9 (ending in Grajaú). Lines 7 and 10 come from the old railroad Santos – Jundiaí, built in 1867, which belonged to São Paulo Railway until 1946, then was transferred to the Brazilian federal government, under which it was managed in various ways (the last one being through the Brazilian Company of Urban Trains [Companhia Brasileira de Trens Urbanos] until it was transferred to the government of the State of São Paulo, resulting in the creation of the CPTM. The section from São Paulo to Jundiaí composes the current Line 7, and the section from São Paulo to Santos (which reaches no further than Rio Grande da Serra) composes the current Line 10. And Lines 11 and 12, serving the East Side of São Paulo and neighboring cities come from the old Central do Brasil railroad, built in 1890 to connect São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro, belonging to CBTU (Brazilian Company of Urban Trains) from 1974 to 1985 and later to the Federal Railroad Network (RFFSA – Rede

Ferrovária Federal, in Portuguese) until 1994, when they were transferred to the CPTM. There is also Line 13, which had its first three stations inaugurated earlier this year [2018] and is taken as an appendix to Line 12 and goes to Guarulhos International Airport.

Due to their different histories, these three pairs of lines have employees who come from very different backgrounds (currently, most of those who come from that former period are in high-ranking functions¹), different infrastructures and different functioning in their lines and train stations, as well as different unions: 7 and 10 – São Paulo Union; 8 and 9 – Sorocabana Union; 11, 12 and 13 – Central do Brasil Union, lingering from the time when the companies they were named after still existed. The Central do Brasil Union is still based in Rio de Janeiro and also represents the employees of Supervia (the metropolitan trains company of Rio); it is associated to CUT (Central Única dos Trabalhadores, or the Worker's Central Union). Sorocabana Union deals with a big base of cargo transportation in the Western part of the state of São Paulo, in the railways that once belonged to Sorocabana; it is currently associated to UGT (União Geral dos Trabalhadores, or Worker's General Union). And the São Paulo Union also includes MRS Logistics and is associated to UGT as well. CPTM is therefore divided between those three unions, according to whichever the line the employee works at, although he or she can choose to join another union.

CPTM workers, therefore, experience very different realities from line to line and are divided by the union structure remaining from the old original companies. Despite its historical force, accumulating more rights than most workers from other unions, they don't relate and don't have much credit within their base, characterizing themselves as a welfare union, with lawyers, summer camps and co-ops². If, on the one hand, such characteristics make it harder to mobilize³ with strength, on the other hand there

¹ Every CPTM station has a station chief (CGE, in Portuguese) and one handler per shift, in charge of Operational Agents. The chiefs are senior workers who have remained from the railway companies CPTM replaced. They produce little and are not dynamic from the point of view of the capital. Officially, a station chief makes little over 6,000 reais; a handler, something between 3,500 and 4,000 reais; an Operational Agent, 2,500 reais. However, due to indemnities the company had to pay through the years (for example, when the old companies merged into CPTM) station chiefs that have been in the company for a long time accumulate wages that may reach over 10,000 reais.

² This co-op allows the employee to take loans with a reduced interest rate in comparison to common banks.

³ Whenever there's the possibility of a strike, each union organizes an assembly and decides whether or not to take part in the mobilization. So, in many cases, the strike may involve only a single union and therefore affect only certain lines. To quote just a few examples of recent strikes: in 2011 CPTM had one of the biggest strikes in its history, winning important demands in regards to wages, benefits and other rights. The strike's first day was limited to lines 8, 9, 11 and 12 (Sorocabana and Central do Brasil unions). The following day lines 7 and 10 joined in (Sindicato de São Paulo), which meant the interruption of the the entire train system.

In 2012 the Central do Brasil Union was alone in joining the subway workers strike, while the other lines remained active. In 2013 again the São Paulo (lines 7 and 10) union did not join a strike with the other unions, In 2017, during the general strike of April 28th, it was the time of Sorocabana to stay out of the strike and only lines 7, 10, 11 and 12 (São Paulo and Central do Brasil) stopped. Since the Collective Agreement is unified for all of CPTM, it isn't permitted that only part of a category of workers gains a right, which causes judicial problems whenever these partial strikes happen. For example: when judging a strike illegal when only one of

seems to be more space to fight outside the union apparatus – when it comes to the Subway, for instance, everything is done through the union, since, besides it being a combative force, it organizes sectorial meetings with real base participation, while CPTM apparatus clearly is a hindrance to the organization of the workers, and every instance is emptied. Nothing will guarantee, however, that future mobilization cannot be motivated by the unification of the three unions or something along the line.

ARRANGEMENT OF WORKERS

As in most work environment these days, those who were hired through public service exams are almost minority at CPTM. There is a big amount of companies that provide service, especially when it comes to cleaning, security and maintenance, but also in the kiosks, stores and other temporary services.

- Security:

The CPTM security system is not unified, as it happens with the Subway: two groups share the work; one of them is a highly restricted CPTM category, the Security Agents (ASs) – known as “marronzinhos” [the brown ones], and who carry weapons⁴ - and the subcontracted watchmen. Currently, three security companies provide service to CPTM: G4S for Lines 8 and 9 and Gocil for Lines 7, 10, 11 and 12. They take care of stations, while a company called Power deals with motorized vigilance and Subways entrances. In order to illustrate the disparity between unionized and outsourced workers in the area: there are currently 583 Security Agents, in comparison to 1270 watchmen posts of work per day (both shifts included). Taking into consideration that the latter work 12x36 shifts (meaning, every other day in 12-hour shifts) there are at least 2540 watchmen, which means that there are 4.3 watchmen to every SA (according to data presented to incoming workers).

- Cleaning:

Two companies do service for CPTM: Tejofran for Lines 8 and 9 and Tonanni for Lines 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13. These employees work five days in a row for every day off (5x1), which always falls on a different weekday – they work on Sundays and holidays, normally having one Sunday off every 42 days. This professional category has an overwhelming presence of older or disabled workers. They make little above minimum wage.

- Maintenance

the unions won't accept the terms and remains on strike, which would then result in rights for only part of the workers in that category that were represented in the other unions.

⁴ Before the 1988 Constitution, railway security was done by federal railway police officers. Due to the lack of clear regulation ever since, new juridical complications arose, in various Brazilian states, regarding the attributions of those officers. Currently, the Security Agents are CPTM employees under the CLT Brazilian Labor Law, having to respect the same Collective Agreement of Work offered to all the other employees.

Many companies provide service for CPTM, which include the maintenance of elevators, escalators, wiring network, rails and trains. I had little contact with and little information about this area, but their number seem to surpass that of workers directly connected to CPTM.

There are very big differences in terms of working conditions between CPTM employees and their outsourced equivalents when it comes to wages, welfare, stability, reaching to higher posts, days off, access to station infrastructure, etc. It makes it difficult for both groups to relate to each other and to develop common grounds and claims. That many professional categories, in such a scenario of inequality, occupy the same space and take care of similar tasks (in the cases of maintenance and security it is even stronger because both areas count with CPTM employees *and* outsourced workers) make room for intrigues, each party trying to push responsibilities and the work to the other. From the point of view of the watchmen, Security Agents don't do anything and always take too long to help in case of a conflict. To the Security Agents, the watchmen don't know what they are doing; despite being more numerous than the Agents, they always need their support. When it comes to maintenance, as CPTM workers are freer, most of the work is done by the outsourced employees, who earn less; such a situation generates a certain resentment in the latter towards the former ("I worked on Lapa station for two years and while we were working hard the CPTM guys were playing dominos" – reports an outsourced worker in charge of wiring network maintenance. Something else complicates matters further – there are many chiefs (in each company and in each CPTM area) and the hierarchy between them is not clear; if, for example, a CPTM station agent gets into a conflict with an outsourced cleaning employee and complains to his superior, odds are the superior will side with her CPTM subordinate, not with a person that works for another company.

Despite all these hurdles, it is clear that the system depends on the integrated work of all the various group of workers and that if, on the one hand there are conflicts, on the other hand there are also gaps from which to build common ground and solidarity. An example: even though the watchmen don't have the right to cross the CPTM turnstiles for free, many of them get to know the station Operational Agents (ASOs) and do it for free with their blessings to save on transportation allowance. As little as ASOs may like to let them do it, they often make an informal agreement, otherwise the watchmen could put less effort in performing their task. In other words, interdependency may force the various groups of workers into a good relationship not out of moral solidarity but because not being solidary could be harmful for all involved.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUTERS AND RAILWAY WORKERS

One of the most remarkable points of everyday life in the stations is the conflict between employees and commuters. From the employees' side, there is often a lack of most basic understanding towards working-class people who may have forgotten

their pass-card, had it blocked by SPTrans, or who may have missed the deadline to renew his or her special card and needs to get to work all the same. Their lack of solidarity is even more pronounced when one takes into consideration there is no severe admittance control by the company, neither are we pressured by our supervisors not to allow commuters to pass without cards or tickets – on the contrary, the higher stances recommend we make an exception in such cases in order to avoid conflicts that may harm the image of the company: at the same time they are treated like animals in a chockablock, expensive train with no infrastructure, they are consumers, therefore can make pressure and control CPTM results⁵. They take all their anger out on the employees, even though we are rarely to blame, but because we are there representing both the company and the State. It is worth mentioning that the number of employees that have to deal with stress-related conditions is not low, having suffered some kind of aggression at work, taking medicines because of the stressful routine they have.

Deep down, it is the company's strategy to put employee and commuter one against the other so that the company itself, politicians and the State disappear from sight when day-to-day problems and conflicts arise. One of the biggest challenges in articulating a struggle to break corporative limits seems to be then shifting the focal point of attention from the commuter x employee conflict to the workers x state conflict, which can be seen every second of every day, but is shown under a distorting light.

Despite making 2,500 reais per month, waking up very early in the morning, working unsocial hours (holidays, Christmas, New Year's etc), living in the same neighborhood commuters live, riding the same trains commuters ride, most operational agents insist in giving themselves the airs as if they were different from most of the population, siding with the order and the State – a feeling that seems to be shared with other civil servants⁶ (how many teachers don't live in the same neighborhood as their "delinquent", "favelado" students, whom they teach without showing any kind of sympathy?). This feeling some employees have of being opposed to the other workers, especially the lowest, rests on some elements, such as wages and welfare that are above the average among those who live in the periphery, professional stability, few goals to meet and being close to other state forces (for example, if a police officer enters a station and sees a row between commuter and employee, she will surely stand by the employee; there is a certain cordiality between police officers and us, which doesn't exist when it comes to other workers, for instance as we greet each other entering in a stations, asking if everything is well, etc.).

⁵ Recently, CPTM has created a WhatsApp profile in order to control vandalism, sexual harassment and illegal trade inside stations and trains, but it is also used to control employees – for instance, they take pictures of employees distracted by the smartphones during working hours and other irregularities for which we later have to answer.

⁶ CPTM employees are not *de facto* civil servants – hired directly by the State. They are, instead, employees of public companies subjected to CLT Brazilian Labor Law. Anyhow, because we passed public service exams, we have more stability than other workers and there is the feeling of being in civil service.

As far as outsourced workers are concerned, they don't relate so closely to their respective companies as we do to CPTM and the "order" in general. Because they earn less, have less rights, less stability and are indirect CPTM employees, they are less disposed to fulfill their roles. It is common, for example, to see friends among watchmen and people who sell things inside the trains, even though their activities should put them in constant conflict – many watchmen say things like "I work 12 hours without a break to make almost nothing, my company doesn't care about me... do you think I'll bother to run around after the vendors? They are just working, we come from the same neighborhood". Despite having to perform a more repressive task than that of operational agents, they seem to be more inclined than CPTM employees to forgive commuters that ask for a "ride" or even those who won't pay the fare. I think the precarious working conditions of outsourced workers make it easier for them to relate with those who live in the periphery – in a universe of working class people who have a hard time to make the money to pay for the fare and, for lack of a steady job, have to sell things inside the trains. Besides, outsourced workers pay for their train tickets, while CPTM workers have it for free and have freer access into the facilities (one feels the refectories and changing rooms belong to the CPTM employees, not to the outsourced people, who would be only granted use of them).

Having mentioned these particularities, we can try to predict what will be the consequences of the decision to hire less and less employees through public service exams in favor of outsourced workers. During the short experience of privatizing the Subway, it has been observed, for instance, an increase in ticket office robbery. High turnover of staff and low wages seem to stimulate illegal action. What consequence will it have to hire less people who relate to "government" companies and with the State in favor of increasing the number of people who work for private companies? In the Subway, privatization has led to the militarization of functions – in the Yellow Line and in the Purple Line, the "operational agents" are also security guards; what if cooptation through stressing the repressive character of the job is a strategy in order to deal with the precariousness of these functions? What will be the consequences of that?

I have presented both the conflict between commuters and employees as well as the lack of identification of the employees who passed public service exams with the rest of the population because they seem to me major hindrances to begin the militance that might go beyond the corporate scope. During the first months of work, a question wouldn't stop chasing me: how can railway workers get support from the population in case of a strike when their everyday relation is based on nothing but conflict? I was driven, then, to a solidary posture towards other workers and commuters whenever possible, turning a blind eye whenever I could. However, there is a limit in trying to build this chains of solidarity, taking into consideration the commuters are always at the service of the capital – solidary or not, my function is to protect the turnstiles and keep the order inside the stations, it would be too naïve of me to think my posture

would change that. But, at the same time, to what extent demonstration of solidarity among employees or towards commuters can make a difference in the political fights they may get engaged in? Taking in teachers and students in consideration once again: it doesn't seem a coincidence that, in 2015, those teachers who supported students in occupying schools were precisely those who were closer to students. And, in a similar sense, in cases when students get engaged against the sacking of a teacher (be it in private schools or universities), it is rare that they will do it to help a teacher they have no esteem for. Even though I see a limit in creating such solidary relationships "every moment of the day", it seems clear that our struggles are fought together with the same workers that are there with us every day, flattering the bosses or helping their colleagues; telling on their outsourced mates or saving their face; screwing commuters up or offering them a hand whenever it is possible.

Be it as it may, what seems fundamental to me is that we can elaborate demands that will benefit both commuters and employees in a direct and evident way. The fight for improvement in station infrastructure, for example, is a possibility, because the current situation brings negative impacts for commuters as well as to employees, who have to hear them complain and run the risk of taking people in wheelchairs up and down the stairs. The fight against welfare reduction or any SPTrans-related issue can also be a possibility, since it is something that is prone to cause conflict between commuters and employees. Solving this issue would, therefore, relieve both sides. Even small demands, such as having an elevator fixed which had been broken for months, for example, could have a very positive result in showing in a concrete way how it is that commuters and employees have a common ground, opposing these two groups to government and company. When it comes to increasing the fare, for example, it cannot move employees directly – only if they understand they are also part of the "population" they could get involved in fighting against it, since an increase can be positive, making it easier to deal with change (as when R\$3,80 turned to R\$4,00 and staff celebrated in the stations) or reducing the number of commuters.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF WORK?

Talking about experiences with organization and struggle in the work place, it is common that militants will value everyday boycotts and sabotage over their work. Comrades that work in telemarketing, for example, try to make it political when operators break up a call on purpose, when they pretend they are too busy to get a call, to keep the client on the other end so that they can answer to a shorter number of calls, etc. Within CPTM, the relationship between employees and commuters present elements that make the debate more complex, because boycotting certain tasks of ours increased the work of commuters and seemed to bring no political issue to the matter. While telemarketing boycotts seemed to point to a conflict against the company in favor of the workers, applied to CPTM similar procedures seemed to point to boycotting no one other than commuters, which would bring no harm to the company. Thus, I often find myself working harder than most of my colleagues, helping

commuters in line, feeding them with accurate information from the internet or from the bus terminal, spending longer in my explanations to them, etc.

Considering the commute to work as working time, we daresay railway employees and commuters fight for time. In working to help commuters, the employees soften the work of those who take public transportation. If, on the other hand, the employees are not good in helping or informing commuters, they throw the job to the commuter, who will take longer and will have a more stressful beginning or end of workday. We can think about this fight for time in the context of other services, since any given establishment that may look like CPTM in structure up to a classroom, where the job of the teacher and the job of the students are the opposite of what we have seen in terms of time: a good teacher will diminish the effort of his or her students in learning, while a bad teacher who skip classes or tells students to study on their own is throwing all the work involved in learning to the students.

At the same time, there are tasks that harm commuters and, if they are not well executed, diminish the stress of those who use the train, instead of increasing it; turnstile supervision in general, be it through checking special cards and benefits or making sure no one will get in without paying the fare. In this case, instead of being alert and doing more than enough, I thought it would be interesting to do the least I could, to play dumb out of my duties. The problem was that, even though repression is explicit, solidarity is silent, often unnoticed, then it is difficult to engender a relationship. Will it be possible to take these two dimensions (a positive one and a negative one) for granted when it comes to work? What if repressive functions are an interesting opportunity, exactly because they harm workers alone, so that, in case they cease, it would harm the bosses alone? If the trains stop, commuters will be harmed, for they will take longer to get to work. If we don't control the turnstiles or stop collecting tickets used "improperly", only the company will be harmed. Not performing those tasks, be it individually or collectively, spontaneously or following a plan will cause less trouble to workers from both sides of the issue.

Perspectives of struggle and organization

This text has no organizational answer to offer, but it tries to "investigate" a specific work place, taking lessons from it, discussing possibilities and, above all, pointing to some limits to the struggle inside the unions. Beyond what has been present so far, I think it is important to end this text by the analysis of the situation of some categories of that had to pass public service exams, such as bank clerks, teachers in municipal schools, Subway workers and Post Office employees, in an effort to examine the efforts of the State companies, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the workers' response.

It is remarkable that banks, CPTM and the Subway haven't touched the Collective Agreement of Work (ACT, in Portuguese). Bank employees were negotiating it until

August and, while most of the opposition predicted cuts and a lukewarm strike in response, FENABAN [the institution representing the interest of bank employees] compromised in keeping ACT, granting 1.5% of compulsory contribution to the union, and there was no strike. CPTM lived a similar story by early May and, after having threatening workers with cutting fundamental rights from ACT such as overtime, overtime for night work and activities that involve risk, and maternity leave, the company stepped back, kept ACT going fully and paid wages and welfare adjusting values to fit the inflation. In the Subway, those who have been in the company for a long time and still work at the ticket box have been transferred to lines 1 and 3 and maintain their right for compensation due to performing an activity that involves risk, while those who were hired more recently do not and work with the outsourced employees. As it seems, as far as hiring categories that may cause attrition, it is much more interesting to the government to hire more outsourced people and to keep privatizing, destroying whole categories of workers, instead of fighting over employees' rights. Of course companies do try to do it, but, even when it happens, their main objective still seems to be privatization, as we can see by the cuts operated in healthcare plans for Post Office employees. Whenever rights were directly cut, the potential of the reaction seemed bigger, as with teachers in municipal schools, who went on a victorious strike against the raise in social security contribution from 11% to 14%.

I believe the main issue for those who try to pick up this fight is how difficult it is to get workers involved in such indirect cuts of rights. Even if there were more radical paths to follow or more consolidated opposition groups within the mentioned categories I believe they would have very little to do when ACT is kept going and the inflation is dealt with. Our enemies seem to have understood it and they are now betting (so far, successfully) in the impotence of the workers of bringing forward demands that will go beyond categories and union calendars, weakening those categories through outsourcing and technological transformations (such as ATM, when it comes to the banks, or the development of web delivery services, when it comes to the post office, or buying tickets automatically in the case of train and Subway stations). Despite having no answers to the dilemmas exposed or to the attacks we have been suffering, I believe it is fundamental to think beyond the logics of unions as they now stand⁷.

⁷ Recently, workers at Yellow Line (ViaQuatro) and Lilac Line (ViaMobilidade) of the Subway joined union of the Subway workers of São Paulo, the same one that deals with the employees that passed public service exams. Wouldn't organized resistance in those line open an opportunity to diminish the rhythm of privatizations, having in mind privatizing interest has to lower the rights of workers and to weaken the movements for demands? Most left-wing groups within the subway cannot, however, see the possibility of fighting privatization if not through Subway workers having passed public service exams fighting for their own posts of work – mostly, they claim for an abstract fight of all the population against the privatization of public services, against companies taking money that belong “to the people”, but always through a generic opposition between “public” and “private”.