

**FROM ARTICULATION TO CONSOLIDATION: FETAMCE AND THE  
WORKERS' STRUGGLE IN THE MUNICIPAL PUBLIC SERVICE OF CEARÁ**

***DA ARTICULAÇÃO À CONSOLIDAÇÃO: A FETAMCE E A LUTA DOS  
TRABALHADORES E TRABALHADORAS DO SERVIÇO PÚBLICO MUNICIPAL  
CEARENSE***

***DE LA ARTICULACIÓN A LA CONSOLIDACIÓN: FETAMCE Y LA LUCHA DE LOS  
TRABAJADORES DEL SERVICIO PÚBLICO MUNICIPAL DE CEARÁ***



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**ABSTRACT:** Discussions about the labor union movement in Brazil have always been linked to the guarantee of workers' rights, especially since the country's industrialization process. This article is a qualitative study that aims to analyze the historic development of the Brazilian public servants' union movement emergence in dialogue with unionism in the state of Ceará. It briefly addresses the trajectory of Fetamce from its organization prior to the 1988 Federal Constitution to the present day, as well as the role of women who, through their political and union leadership, have consolidated the federation as an instrument of working class struggle in the municipal public service sector in Ceará. Despite political and ideological obstacles, the results indicate that public sector unionism in Ceará is significant and transformative, playing an essential role in promoting an inclusive and fair union structure.

**KEYWORDS:** Brazilian unionism. Gender. Territory. Labor geography. Municipal public service.

**RESUMO:** *As discussões sobre o movimento sindical no Brasil sempre estiveram atreladas à garantia de direitos da classe trabalhadora, sobretudo a partir do processo de industrialização brasileira. O presente artigo trata-se de uma pesquisa de natureza qualitativa, tendo como objetivo analisar a historicização do surgimento do movimento sindical dos servidores públicos brasileiros em diálogo com o sindicalismo no estado do Ceará, abordando brevemente a trajetória da Fetamce, desde sua articulação anterior à Constituição Federal de 1988 até os dias atuais, assim como a atuação de mulheres que, por meio de seu protagonismo político e sindical, consolidaram a federação como instrumento de luta da classe trabalhadora do ramo dos servidores públicos municipais cearenses. Mesmo havendo entraves político-ideológicos, os resultados indicam que o sindicalismo do serviço público cearense é marcante e transformador e cumpre um papel essencial na promoção de uma estrutura sindical inclusiva e justa.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Sindicalismo brasileiro. Gênero. Território. Geografia do trabalho. Serviço público municipal.

**RESUMEN:** *Las discusiones sobre el movimiento sindical en Brasil siempre han estado vinculadas a la garantía de los derechos de la clase trabajadora, especialmente a partir del proceso de industrialización brasileña. El presente artículo es una investigación de naturaleza cualitativa que tiene como objetivo analizar la historización del surgimiento del movimiento sindical de los servidores públicos brasileños en diálogo con el sindicalismo en el estado de Ceará, abordando brevemente la trayectoria de la Fetamce desde su articulación anterior a la Constitución Federal de 1988 hasta la actualidad, así como la actuación de las mujeres que, por medio de su protagonismo político y sindical, consolidaron la federación como instrumento de lucha de la clase trabajadora del sector de los servidores públicos municipales cearenses. Aun existiendo obstáculos político-ideológicos, los resultados indican que el sindicalismo del servicio público cearense es significativo y transformador, y cumple un papel esencial en la promoción de una estructura sindical inclusiva y justa.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Sindicalismo brasileño. Género. Territorio. Geografía del trabajo. Servicio público municipal.

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## Introduction

This article is the result of the master's thesis entitled "The participation of women in the union struggle: the performance of the Federation of workers in the Municipal Public Service of the state of Ceará – FETAMCE", presented to The Graduate Program in geography of the Vale do Acaraú State University, located in the municipality of Sobral (CE). The dissertation analyzed the gender relations in the Ceará trade union movement that reflect the Brazilian trade union movement, in which machismo, misogyny, the historical erasure of women's performance, the denial of political spaces, and male dominance are rooted in the structure of society. Issues of gender, labor relations, productive structure, and trade unionism are widely studied by sociology, philosophy, and history.

However, geography also becomes a relevant field of study since Geographical Science investigates geographical space, defining territories where power relations occur. In this sense, the dissertation explored gender relations in the union policy of municipal public servants in Ceará, presenting the history of the emergence of the Federation of Workers in the Municipal Public Service of the State of Ceará (Fetamce). The research highlights how trade union policy is executed in Ceará, with emphasis on the promotion of gender equality, which is promoted by the federation and implemented by trade union entities in the municipalities of Ceará.

In this perspective, this article is a theoretical-methodological path of the master's thesis research, having as a cut and objective to analyze in brief notes the historicization of the emergence of the union movement of Brazilian public servants in dialogue with trade unionism in the state of Ceará, addressing the trajectory of Fetamce from its articulation before the Federal Constitution of 1988 to the present day, as well as the performance of women who, through their political and trade union protagonism, consolidated the federation as an instrument of struggle of the working class in the branch of public servants municipalities of Ceará.

Therefore, qualitative research was used to delineate the historicization of Fetamce in line with the trade union movement in Brazil. According to Apolinário (2012), all research needs a literature review. It is from this understanding that this academic production points out new theoretical contributions to the discussions about the trade union movement, with emphasis on trade union policy in the state of Ceará. The daily life of the trade union movement presents itself as a broad school, challenging us to read, learn, and, above all, understand the processes in which we are involved. Both in the field of militancy and in the professional and not in

personal training, the trade union movement pushes us to become better human beings, as long as we can carry out considerations, where a fundamental challenge lies.

In various moments of militancy we are faced with numerous contradictions. It is important to note that, at this time, we also act as a researcher and union activist. We cannot separate our identity as a researcher from that of a militant, because our heart beats stronger in the face of small advances and is filled with tenderness for the struggle, despite the constant attacks we face as women. In all political spheres, misogyny, homophobia and machismo still persist, making our perseverance an act of rebellion. We continue to believe in our role as agents of transformation, even in the face of the diverse forms of gender-based violence to which we are subjected.

As highlighted by Haesbaert (2004), the investigation of the relations between unions and the state at the territorial level seeks to understand the way in which the entities that represent workers organize their actions at different territorial scales, whether at the municipal, state or national level. Carvalho and Thomaz Júnior (2020) highlight that the relations between unions and the state become complex due to the division of class into categories and territorial segmentation (municipalities), providing an advantage to the capitalist who exercises hegemony over the territory.

In this context, the place emerges as the point of territorialization of the phenomena, the result of the clash between capital and labor, becoming the central reference for a geographical analysis. However, it is crucial to recognize that the place is not isolated from reality; it is a microcosm integrated into a broader movement that transcends the place to acquire global connotations while maintaining its local relevance. Geography stands out for the understanding of these scalar quantities.

Thus, in addition to the introduction, the article is organized into three thematic sections. In the topic titled "*the evolution of the trade union movement in Brazil: challenges, achievements and diversity of perspectives*" is presented, in brief notes, how the working class organized itself in Brazil, considering historical, sociological and geographical aspects and a little of the evolution of the trade union movement in the face of political and ideological obstacles. In the thematic section "*the political ferment and the emergence of the new syndicalism in Brazil in the 1980s*," a panorama is drawn of how a new Brazilian trade unionism emerged in line with the performance of trade unionism before previous governments. In the last thematic topic entitled "*the political performance of FETAMCE in the territory of Ceará*," it is highlighted in summary the emergence of this institution after the Constitution of 1988.

## **The evolution of the trade union movement in Brazil: challenges, achievements and diversity of perspectives**

The territory that constitutes Brazil today was invaded and plundered in the process of European colonization, resulting in the exploitation of labor and the imposition of precarious conditions on its people. Changes in economic cycles, such as the sugarcane, gold, and coffee cycle, shaped labor relations and influenced the organization of the working class in response to the exploitation and oppression they faced. Initially, the labor of Indigenous Peoples was used, followed by the enslavement of Africans, marked by violent forced immigration. The violence intensified with the whitewashing policy and the incentive to absorb the labor of European immigrants. These European workers contributed to the organization of the Brazilian working class in the face of imposed exploitation.

The resistance of workers throughout history is a crucial element to understand the territorial formation of Brazil and the organization of the working class. Slavery was a cruel and inhuman institution that left deep marks on Brazilian history and society. After the abolition of slavery in 1888, the descendants of enslaved Africans faced significant challenges in their quest for equality and integration into Brazilian society. Many have been relegated to informal and precarious jobs, perpetuating economic and social inequalities. The legacy of slavery is still present today with deep racial and social disparities in Brazil.

It is true that exploitation and oppression in the country were not limited only to slavery, which still remains having only suited the transformations of the world of work, but included forms of exploitation and discrimination of free people. In addition, Brazilian society has historically been marked by profound gender and ethnic inequalities. “Whitewashing” was a policy debated and encouraged at some points in Brazilian history as an attempt to “improve” the population through miscegenation with Europeans, intending to decrease the presence of African and Indigenous traits. This policy reflects the racist mentality and racial hierarchy that permeated the society of the time.

According to Pochmann (2022), during periods of expansion of capitalism, especially in its early phases, there was a liberal rhetoric that emphasized the idea that the free market and the absence of state intervention would be the best paths to economic and social progress. In Brazil, the welfare state has been won through many struggles waged by the working class. Few advances have been made, always in a mediation of forces between those who are covered or partially served by the state and those who do not recognize themselves as working class. The

latter often strengthens the discourse of an elite that supports the capitalist wave of the minimal state. Therefore, it is necessary to emphasize that the social and labor achievements in Brazil resulted from a continuous collective effort, always in confrontation with opposing interests.

In this context, according to Pochmann (2022), the first forms of Organization of Brazilian Workers emerge from the precariousness of the state in promoting public policies that serve the working and less well-off population through the trade union, aimed at defending the valorization of free labor and resistance in the face of capitalist exploitation. At that time, the Union acted as an institution of multifunctionality in the areas of Training (school of arts and crafts), health, welfare (mutual aid funds), culture (soirees of conviviality center) and politics.

Trade unions, dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were the first forms of worker organization in Brazil. They were focused on specific groups of professionals, such as artisans and skilled laborers, and sought not only to improve working conditions, but also to create a network of social and economic support for members. With the minimal state, institutions of social protection and support for workers were often lacking, which prompted the workers themselves to organize to fill these gaps. These unions not only fought for better working conditions, but also played a key role in building a collective identity among workers and promoting values of solidarity and justice.

This form of union organization in Brazil shows the importance of collective action by workers to claim their rights and improve their living conditions. These movements also contributed to shaping the trajectory of the Brazilian trade union movement over time. The transformations that occurred in the post-abolition context and the changes in the international scenario contributed incisively to create favorable conditions for the beginning of the industrialization process in Brazil, helping to shape the country's economy and society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Labor power is a kind of special commodity in this process of generating profit. It is composed of women and men who, devoid of any possessions, rely only on the strength of their bodies and their intellectual capacities to survive. Its special character is because market determinations add up the immediate and historical needs and interests of these dispossessed to define their price, which is called wages (Rossi, 2009, p. 9-10).

Some issues are glaring and it becomes a mistake to contextualize the organization of workers without considering social, racial, gender and access to opportunities inequalities in Brazil, especially in the context of the labor market and the entry of workers into the public service. Structural racism and other forms of oppression are realities that have impacted

Brazilian society, influencing the distribution of opportunities, the occupation of positions and the living conditions of different ethnic groups.

In this sense, the working class is a product of the contradictions generated by capitalism, the expropriation of the worker's labor force, class exploitation and the physical and moral violence imposed by the bosses to produce profits and accumulate wealth. In Brazil, the working class and other working classes emerged with the end of slavery, in the post-1880 period, and then with the abolition of slavery and the emergence of wage labor on a large scale, in the twentieth century.

The formation of Brazilian society left deep marks, influencing social, political and economic dynamics to the present day. The transition to the Republic in Brazil brought challenges of building and maintaining an unstable democracy. The fragility of democratic institutions and the presence of coups throughout history have direct impacts on public policies, the organization of workers and the promotion of social rights.

It was only with the immigration of European peasants and workers, during the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, that the experiences in the workers' struggles based on the political ideologies constituted in Europe contributed to the organization of the trade union movement. Many of the European immigrants had already experienced the trade union movement and workers' struggles in their home countries, where socialist and anarchist ideas were on the rise.

They brought with them knowledge about the organization of workers, demands for better working conditions and mobilization strategies such as strikes and direct actions, influencing the discourse around capitalist exploitation and social inequalities. These ideologies influenced the formation of trade union movements in Brazil, contributing to a more radical approach in the search for labor rights and social justice.

The contribution of immigrants to the organization of Brazilian workers is undeniable. However, it is important to remember that resistance and the struggle for better days and freedom predate the incomplete abolition of 1888. History still omits the capacity of mobilization and struggle of the workers who were enslaved and the enslaved free. Thus, it is important to say that the workers had their struggles made invisible for many years in academic productions. The organization of the working class surrounds capitalism and its metamorphoses since its formation, when they were subjected to exploitation. As elucidated by Mattos (2009, p.13).

A story of misadventures and adventures of workers in bakeries, between 1876 and 1912, told by a category leader, João de Mattos, in a manuscript located among the papers seized by the carioca political police in the 1930s. In the manuscript, João records his memories of the struggles of employees in bakeries from the time of slavery to the time of trade union mobilizations.

Thus, the contradictions of the class struggle propitiates the emergence of the trade union movement, which goes far beyond an instrument of overcoming capitalism, representing the interests of workers at a given time for demands for remuneration and better working conditions, as exhausting working hours were imposed in unhealthy and dangerous places, just as the organization remained alive with each attempt to disarticulate by productive restructuring becoming a space of struggles that overcome labor issues and involve social rights denied to workers and a large portion of the Brazilian population.

According to Rossi (2009), unions are types of social organizations aimed at defending the economic and social interests of workers in their respective professional categories, with the purpose of seeking wage improvements, and better working and living conditions in general for their members. Unions also play a unifying role by collectively representing workers regardless of differences such as gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation. The trade union movement is, in fact, an integral part of the political life of the working class.

With the population predominantly agricultural and economic activities focused on the countryside, workers organized during the Old Republic (1889-1930). In the first decades of the twentieth century in Brazil, industrialization was still in its early stages in the country, representing a limited portion of the employed population. Mattos (2009) highlights that there was a significant presence of women and children as factory labor, especially in the textile industries, subjected to precarious working conditions, lower wages and exhausting hours, often equivalent to those of men. The author also points out that reports of overexploitation, accidents, diseases and violence in the workplace were common in the workers' press, and particularly shocking were the stories of abuse against women and violence directed at children.

Trade unions played an important role as the main advocates and spokespersons for workers in this period. Although they were not, for the most part, directly involved in electoral politics due to the lack of voting rights for many workers and for women, trade unions still represented a central point of organization and political mobilization. They were responsible for channeling workers' demands, grievances, and discontent, seeking better working conditions, fair wages, and broader social transformation.

Paula (2015) considers, as a primordial reference for workers' organizations in Brazil at first, revolutionary syndicalism inspired by the French model and strongly influenced by

anarchist assumptions. Its objective was to organize workers for the general strike, and that, according to Molina (2017), sought, from the trade union struggles, to overthrow the capitalist regime, the state, and all forms of oppression. Still, its internationalist character stands out, since there was a strong feeling of struggle beyond borders, considering the territorial isolation in the organizational process of the bourgeois instruments to fragment the workers. Thus, trade union struggles steal the scene in Brazil, with the strike being the main instrument of resistance.

According to Paula (2015), the workers' struggles harshly repressed in the governments of the Old Republic, come to have another interpretation in the Vargas dictatorship or in the Vargas Era (1930 to 1945), full of political conflicts with quite different conjunctures in its bulge, understanding them within the scope of class conciliation and not necessarily as a police issue. The 1934 Constitution brought some significant changes at the trade union level, seeking to limit the influence of anarchist and communist unions, while allowing a certain plurality and union autonomy within some limits. Among the changes introduced are: union plurality and autonomy, that is, the new Constitution allowed the existence of multiple unions within the same professional category, which aimed to fragment the union movement and weaken the more unified forces.

In addition, the Constitution recognized trade union autonomy in relation to the state, although it still maintained a certain ministerial subordination, Prohibition of unitary organizations as an attempt to avoid the creation of unions that brought together various professional categories and, consequently, had greater bargaining power and influence, restrictions on union organization in the workplace, hindering the access of union leaders to the bases and the effective participation of workers in class bodies; union pulverization that aimed to create a multiplicity of fragmented unions and with less capacity for mobilization and collective pressure.

These changes reflect the political dynamics of the time, which aimed at the disarticulation of workers, with a government that sought to control and influence the trade union movement to prevent the growth of more radical trends, such as anarchist and communist unions. The result was a more fragmented and controlled Union environment, with limitations on actions and broader mobilizations by workers.

The Constitution of 1937, also known as "Polaca" due to its author, President Getúlio Vargas, brought a series of changes in the Brazilian trade union structure. These changes were influenced by the corporatist model adopted by Mussolini's Italian Fascism, which sought to control and regulate trade unions and labour relations as part of a strategy of centralizing state

power, creating a trade union system that was highly controlled by the government and subject to state intervention. The trade unions were organized into a single national confederation, known as the National Council of Syndicalism (CNS), which was under the tutelage of the state and aimed to promote harmony between the interests of capital and labor.

Already in the government of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), Brazil went through a period of economic growth and development known as “*Plano de Metas*” (Roadmap). With the objective of fostering infrastructure and development projects and promoting a rapid advance in the industrialization and modernization of the country. One of the notable characteristics of this period was the appreciation of the minimum wage, which reached one of the highest levels in its history. However, from 1959, the minimum wage began to suffer falls and losses in value. Inflation, resulting from increased monetary emissions and government indebtedness, was one of the main causes of these wage losses. In 1960, the year of the JK government shutdown, the minimum wage was already at a lower level than in previous years. The decrease continued in the following years, impacting workers and contributing to economic challenges that would be faced by subsequent governments, provoking the effervescence of labor movements.

We must not forget that the 1960s saw the expansion of the labor movement, the struggles in the countryside develop with the peasant leagues along with the unionization of rural workers. Popular calls for basic reforms are growing in the country, which has the struggle for agrarian reform as its “flagship.” In the conjuncture of the 1960s, mapping the dominant trade union trends at that stage, it is possible to locate at least four groups of leaders: a) Catholics, gathered in workers’ circles; b) the self-described “renovators,” generally left-wing, but critical of the PCB; c) the leaders who identified themselves as “nationalists,” who roughly grouped the communists and left-wing laborists; and D) those who proclaimed themselves “democratic” trade unionists, who identified themselves by the previous control of the top organs of the trade union structure.

In this perspective, during the period of the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985), the trade union movement was extremely persecuted; thousands of revocations of leaders and interventions in trade union entities dismantled, in a few months, the work of two decades of mobilization. According to Nogueira (2005), the coup d’état delayed for more than a decade the emergence of unionism of public employees, while intensifying the depoliticization, bureaucratization and welfare of official unions. It was a period of human rights violations, censorship, arbitrary arrests and political persecution. The intention behind this repression was not only to neutralize the political opposition, but also to control and manipulate the working

class in favor of the regime. By defending the ideals of the military dictatorship and supporting the authorities constituted by the authoritarian regime, the interventionists sought to undermine the ability of unions and workers to mobilize and resist.

In summary, trade union organization in Brazil is a reflection of turbulent historical-geographical and political-ideological contexts, with the rise of divergent interests in a multifaceted political context to perceive between the lines the consequences, advances, permanence and daily challenges of trade union activity in the Brazilian context.

### **The political ferment and the emergence of the new syndicalism in Brazil in the 1980s**

The 1980s was a period of intense mobilizations, marking Resistance against the military coup. It is worth starting by highlighting the emergence of the Workers' Party (PT), founded in 1980, which promoted the creation of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT), founded in 1983, being one of the first major trade union centers in the country and played a central role in the rearticulation of workers in a post-military dictatorship period.

In this context, it is important to highlight the role of the Catholic Church in Brazil during the 1980s, marked by a theological current and political action that had a strong identification with the oppressed sectors of the population. Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and social pastoral communities, associated with liberation theology, played a significant role in the political life of the country. These groups have also played an important role in raising awareness of the faithful about their rights and in promoting actions of solidarity and justice.

It is noteworthy the emergence of the landless rural workers movement (MST) in 1984, which became a major reference movement in Brazilian politics. We can consider that the 1980s were marked by an intense political effervescence of the emergence of new actors in the political scene that boosted the popular struggle. The creation of the CUT marks the emergence of the new Brazilian trade unionism which, according to Nogueira (2005), reinforces the great division between the new trade unionism represented in the CUT and the old trade unionism represented in the General Confederations of Workers (CGTs) and, later, in the union force, articulating the more moderate unions linked to the corporatist union structure. Still according to Nogueira (2005), the transition from associativism to unionism of state employees and employees develops predominantly in this period, that is, in the 1980s.

According to Mattos (2003), the movement that became known as “new syndicalism” had as its main leader Lula (Luís Inácio Lula da Silva). They advocated the idea that trade unions should be autonomous, independent of the state and voluntarily funded by the workers themselves, so that they could truly represent the interests of the working class. This movement had a significant role in the history of Brazilian trade unionism and contributed to the formation of more independent unions, in this context the unions of public servants and active in the defense of workers' rights are realized. Lula, in turn, became a prominent figure in this movement and eventually president of Brazil, exerting a lasting impact on the country's politics and trade unionism.

Soon after the promulgation of the 1988 Constitution, Ferraz (2014) points out that the Sarney government tried to approve law 7,783/89, known as the private sector strike law, in response to the outbreak of strikes in the period. The 1988 Constitution is an important milestone that allowed public sector workers the legality of organizing in unions and participating in political debates. This represented a significant advance in guaranteeing workers' rights. The 1990s represented a period of profound transformations in the Brazilian trade union scene, influenced by political, economic and social changes, marked by neoliberal policies of dismantling the state, through economic opening oriented to the free market, a policy adopted in the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso from 1995 to 2002.

The advances of this neoliberal policy, accompanied by structural unemployment, privatization, deregulation of labor relations, etc., reflected directly on the trade union movement, causing it to face significant challenges leading to structural changes that shaped its trajectory, including the fragmentation of trade union centers, weakening the representation of workers. At that time, the union demands had as a central aspect, the struggle for wage replacement due to high inflation.

Regarding the advances of neoliberal policy, Harvey (2011) highlights the unequal geographical character, characterized by the tripod (privatization, financial deregulation with incentive to the world market and labor force) that undermines the welfare state in the Central countries and the little that has been obtained from social rights in Latin America, strengthening the division of the organization of workers. The working population of imperialist countries in which there is a welfare state tends to unite in defense of the national economic space, which for them represents employment, rights, and a high standard of living.

According to Harvey (2011, p. 61):

Labor reserves exist everywhere, and there are few geographical barriers to capitalist access. Being a characteristic of globalization, it is necessary to understand the geopolitical scenario to elucidate how structural changes take place in Brazil. The political assault on working-class movements around the world has reduced workers' resistance to very modest levels almost everywhere. The crisis of 2008 to 2009 cannot be understood in terms of crushing profits. Wage repression because of the overabundant labor supply and the consequent lack of effective consumer demand are much more serious problems. However, the question of work never ends. Bustle of work may well arise as a serious problem at any time and in any place. It is important to take into account the uneven geographical development of trade union struggles.

In this sense, in the 2000s, several public policies were implemented focusing on micro and small businesses including the creation of the figure of the Individual Microentrepreneur (MEI), which allowed the formalization of people who worked for themselves. In addition to these changes that contradictorily negatively impact the worker, there have been efforts to improve the hiring conditions of domestic workers, considering it an advance that regularizes a historically exploited category. These policies have had significant impacts on labor market dynamics and employment relations in Brazil.

The dynamics of trade unionism in Brazil during the 2000s, especially during the PT governments, which were often associated with neo-developmental policies (Lula government from 2003 to 2010, and Dilma government from 2011 to August 2016) had been recovering from the harsh 1990s. An increase in the number of strikes and demands linked not only to labor issues, aimed to resist the dismantling of the state by neoliberal policies such as privatization, focusing on wage issues and working conditions.

The Brazilian trade union movement has gone through several phases in its history. During the PT governments there was a period of greater visibility and union influence, but the relationship to union leaders, who held more power of articulation, were appointed to positions at government levels which generated challenges to maintain independence and representation of workers' interests. Law No. 11,648 of March 31, 2008, which officially recognizes trade union centers and participation in tripartite forums and councils strengthened the role of trade union organizations in the political and negotiation scene.

In this sense, we emphasize that in Brazil the project of the bourgeoisie was realized once again in 2016 with a coup d'état. As at other times in the history of our country, advances in social policies were noticeable, despite the economic crisis that had set in. A legitimately elected president suffered the impeachment process, and the union movement failed to react, showing its weakness in facing difficulties and in articulating an effective resistance during this

period. It is crucial to highlight the misogyny present in the 2016 coup. President Dilma Rousseff, the first woman to hold the presidency of Brazil, faced not only political opposition but also intense gender bias. During the impeachment process, misogyny manifested itself in various ways, from disparaging comments and personal attacks to underestimating his competence and legitimacy as a leader.

This disarticulation and weakening of the trade union movement, in addition to being a worldwide trend, is related to changes in the political and economic context, as well as internal factors, such as divisions within the movement and political polarization. The criminalization of trade union and social movements is growing, which further aggravates the situation. The misogyny faced by Dilma Rousseff is a reflection of the deep gender inequalities present in Brazilian society, which also affect the organization and struggle of the working class.

After the first stage of the coup, which was the removal of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016, Michel Temer assumed the presidency and implemented a series of austerity policies. The Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, known as the “spending ceiling,” was characterized as the second stage of the coup and was one of the most significant measures of that period. It imposed a cap on public spending, tying it to inflation for a period of 20 years. This had a significant impact on the social and investment policies of the federal government, generating debates about the effects of austerity on Brazilian society.

The assault on the welfare of the population puts the State on a collision course, not only with the last strongholds of unions in many countries, among them the public sector unions, but also with the populations most directly dependent on state provision. The policy of austerity leads to a reduction in the quality and accessibility of public services, as well as to an increase in inequalities going in the opposite direction to any economic growth.

The second measure of the coup President, Michel Temer, which was characterized as the third stage of the coup, was carried out, in 2017, a labor reform through law 13.467/2017, with the real objective of withdrawing rights that were won by the working class through many struggles and clashes with the government and employers. This reform resulted in the precariousness of work, exposing the Brazilian fragility in the perspective of capital restructuring and creating positions with less security and guarantees for workers. It is important to consider that the consequences of such reforms are multifaceted and may take time to fully understand. The analysis of the long-term impacts of these policies on the economy and employment quality is ongoing and may vary depending on the specific context of each sector and region of the country.

In the trajectory of the Brazilian trade union movement, several important issues related to its evolution and the challenges to be faced stand out, among which the mediation of forces with the state, which in the first moment was involved in the process of disarticulation oppressing the organization of workers and in a second moment bureaucratizing in a process of negotiation and regulation of labor relations and the influences of government policies on union activities. Class conflict and the diversity of the working class have resulted in political and ideological divisions that sometimes weaken the unity of workers composed of skilled labor, industrial workers and immigrants searching for their common interests, influencing Union dynamics and adopted strategies.

In this sense Thomaz Júnior (2002) argues that the alienation of the worker's identity with another worker is reinforced because they are divided into professional categories which, in turn, while it is the product of the division of Labor, is the basis of the corporate identification of labor in Union categories. That is, the official union structure itself in Brazil, historically built under the corporatist pillars and bringing in its representation the Union delimited in municipal borders. With this, the state, through Article 8, item II of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which vetoes the right to create more than one union of the same category on the same territorial basis.

The existence of various segments (part-time, temporary, outsourced, informal worker, etc.), many of them without any union representation, only tends to hinder the agglutination of forces in the clash with capital, strengthening the crisis of syndicalism that took on a great dimension in the political-ideological sphere, characterized by the integration of unions to mercantile logic, limiting union praxis to the universe of the commodity and seeking to guarantee, in most cases, only better wage conditions.

At this threshold, the election of Jair Messias Bolsonaro to the presidency of the Republic in 2018 produced relevant impacts on public policies and political discourse. Torres, Sousa Júnior and Brazil (2021) when researching the characteristics and impacts of Bolsonaro's narratives, emphasize that his positioning is quite expressive and authoritarian, based on an anti-democratic language, which contributed too much to the climate of polarization, political intolerance and hostility.

Thus, his government used conservative orientations in the social, economic and environmental spheres, with particularly negative effects for workers. However, such changes cannot be understood as isolated or inaugural phenomena. On the contrary, they are part of a

historical cycle of State counter-reforms, associated with the advance of neoliberalism and the regressive reconfiguration of labor relations in Brazil.

As shown in Table 01, pension reforms are part of this continuous process, begun in the 1990s, deepened throughout subsequent governments and intensified in a more systematic way during the Michel Temer government, especially from the explicit adoption of fiscal austerity policies. The Bolsonaro government, in this sense, does not inaugurate this cycle, but radicalizes it, consolidating a broader offensive against Labor and Social Security rights and against the union organization itself.

This context helps to explain the union movement's reduced capacity for action in the recent period. At the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, Brazilian trade unionism presented a framework of structural fragility and political-organizational crisis, the result of both the historical accumulation of institutional, political and financial losses and the progressive distancing between union leaders and their social bases. This dynamic was intensified during the governments of the Workers' Party, when a significant part of the main union leaders began to occupy positions within the State, strengthening institutional channels of mediation, but simultaneously contributing to the emptying of the union leadership and the reduction of the capacity for grassroots mobilization.

As Antunes (2018; 2019) argues, this process favored the defensive integration of trade unionism into institutional logic, limiting its performance in the face of the expansion of the structural precariousness of work and the corrosion of collective resistance mechanisms. In convergence, Braga (2012; 2017) points out that such conformation produced a predominantly mediating unionism, with difficulties in dialoguing with the most precarious segments of the working class, especially those inserted in flexible, outsourced and informal ties. Inserted in this correlation of forces largely unfavorable to the working class, the approval of Constitutional Amendment No. 103/2019 represents the culmination of this cycle of pension reforms, consolidating the logic of fiscal adjustment and deepening the dismantling of social protection, with direct impacts on the public service and on the limits of union action in Brazil.

**Table 1** – Behavioral analysis of the trade union movement on pension reform between 1990 and 2019

| 1990: Collor de Melo government                                                                    |                                                                                            |                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Changes</i>                                                                                     | <i>Impacts</i>                                                                             | <i>Union reaction</i>                                                                                        |
| Administrative and financial reorganization of social security.<br>Creation of the Social Security | It aimed at reducing the public deficit and improving the management of pension resources. | There was significant resistance, especially from public servant unions, who feared benefit cuts and reduced |

|                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Secretariat and decoupling of Social Security from the social security budget.                                                                                                        |                                                                                                | entitlements. The union movement organized demonstrations, although the overall impact was limited.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Measures to improve the collection and management of benefits, without substantial changes in the rights of beneficiaries.                                                            | Improved the administrative and financial efficiency of Social Security                        | Union reaction was more moderate, with support for measures that would improve efficiency without reducing entitlements.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>1998: Fernando Henrique Cardoso Government</b>                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Introduction of Constitutional Amendment 20, establishing minimum retirement age and increasing contribution time                                                                     | It introduced a minimum age and sought to balance Social Security accounts.                    | Strong opposition from the trade union movement. The CUT was one of the main organizers of the mobilizations against the reform, claiming that the measure harmed workers and did not adequately address the issue of public debt.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>2003: Lula Government</b>                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Constitutional Amendment 41, changing the form of calculating the benefits of public servants and introducing pension contributions for retirees and pensioners of the public sector. | Increased equity between the pension systems of public servants and the private sector.        | There was significant resistance, especially from public servant unions. The CUT, despite being close to the Lula government, mobilized its members against aspects of the reform that they considered harmful to public servants.                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>2005: Lula Government</b>                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Constitutional Amendment 47, allowing age-proportional retirement for public servants with more favorable transition rules.                                                           | It relaxed some rules imposed by the previous reform.                                          | The reaction was more favorable compared to the 2003 reform, but there was still criticism that the changes did not fully meet the demands of workers.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>2015: Dilma Rousseff Government</b>                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Implementation of Formula 85/95, allowing retirement without the incidence of the pension factor.                                                                                     | It benefited workers with a favorable combination of age and time of contribution.             | The move was welcomed by unions, who saw it as a way to reduce welfare penalties.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>2017: Michel Temer Government</b>                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Reform proposing a minimum age of 65 years for men and 62 for women, with 25 years of minimum contribution.                                                                           | The proposal faced great resistance and was not approved.                                      | General strikes and demonstrations across the country. The CUT and other trade unions were protagonists in mobilizing against the reform, arguing that it harmed the most vulnerable workers.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>2019: Jair Bolsonaro Government</b>                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Changes</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Impacts</b>                                                                                 | <b>Union reaction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Approval of Constitutional Amendment 103, establishing minimum retirement age, minimum contribution time and recalculation of benefits.                                               | Comprehensive restructuring of the pension system, seeking long-term financial sustainability. | Strong opposition from the unions, with strikes and demonstrations. The CUT, the Trade Union force and other trade union centers sharply criticized the reform, claiming it increased inequality and penalized the poorest workers. However, the ability to mobilize was limited due to the disarticulation and weakening of the trade union movement at the time. |

Source: Elaboration of the authors.

In this sense, the discourse of reducing public machine spending remains strong in Brazil. The trade union struggle is an important part of Brazil's history and has played a significant role in winning labor rights and promoting democracy. The coming years may indeed be challenging for Brazilian trade unionism, requiring resilience and adaptive strategies. However, history shows that trade union movements have the capacity to adapt and respond to new challenges, and civil society mobilization and organization can play a crucial role in defending labor rights and democracy.

### **The political performance of Fetamce in the Ceará territory**

Fetamce had its origin in a historical context marked by movements around the process of redemocratization and labor struggles in Brazil, especially during the twentieth century. Founded on April 28, 1990, the Federation emerged as a response to the demands and needs of municipal workers in Ceará, seeking to strengthen grassroots unions. Fetamce reflects the diversity and scope of workers in the municipal public service, encompassing different categories. Fetamce's work in the Ceará territory is broad and comprehensive, involving collective bargaining, mobilizations, wage campaigns and other actions aimed at defending the interests of municipal public servants.

The Federation plays a central role in articulating and representing these workers, seeking to guarantee better working conditions, decent wages and labor rights. With regard to gender equality policies in Fetamce's grassroots unions, there is a growing effort to promote equity between men and women in the workplace and in union representation. This includes holding debates, trainings and affirmative actions aimed at addressing challenges such as sexual harassment, wage disparities, maternity and paternity leave, among others. In addition, the federation has encouraged the active participation of women in union leadership, aiming at diversity and gender representation in its decision-making bodies.

Thus, the analysis of gender relations within Fetamce's Union policy reveals a movement towards the promotion of equality and equity between men and women in grassroots unions. However, it is important to continue to deepen and strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in order to provide fairer, more inclusive and representative work environments for all municipal workers in Ceará. It is important to emphasize that the Brazilian

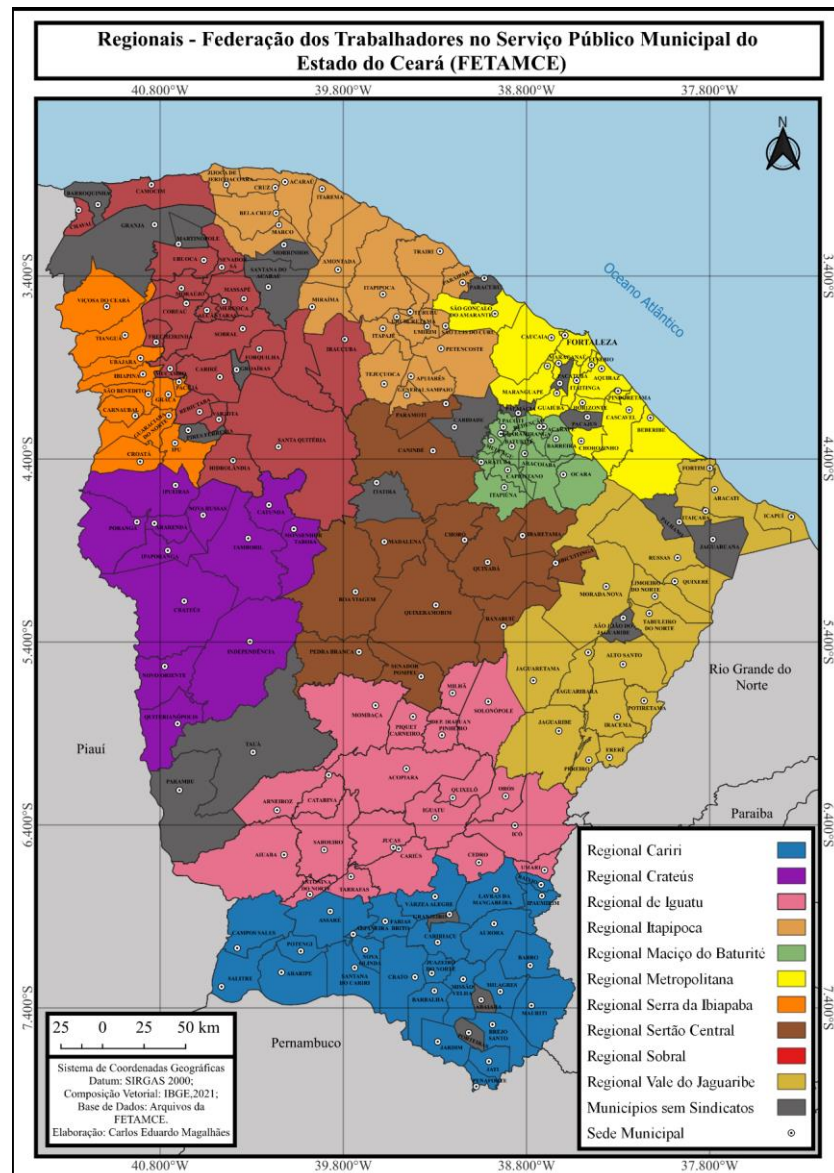
Public Service is predominantly composed of women<sup>3</sup>. In the trade union entities that represent municipal public service workers, women occupy decision-making positions on executive boards, contrary to the logic of the trade union movement of several other branches of professional activity, where male performance predominates.

Despite the progress achieved at the state level, especially at the trade union level, we have not yet achieved full protection against moral, sexual and other forms of violence related to gender issues. To make matters worse, we often face a split base between two union entities. In this challenging scenario, women leaders are faced with the complexity of reconciling the administrative demands of the union with the conduct of union policy, in a context in which we often have two released leaders. In recent decades, Fetamce has made significant efforts to improve its political articulation, territorializing itself, and establishing a solid network of unions at its base (Figure 1).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the study by the National School of Public Administration (ENAP), published in 2024, the gender disparity in the Brazilian public sector is notorious. It was possible to infer that women represent 59% of federal employees. However, they receive, on average, 24% less than men. This discrepancy reflects a broader picture of inequality in the country, being related to historically established gender roles.

**Figure 1 – Regionalization of Fetamce**



Source: Prepared by the authors with data collected in the archives of the Federation.

However, small changes occur in some municipalities that perceive better opportunities when articulating in a region that was not initially planned. It is important to emphasize that, depending on the capacity of articulation in a given region, some unions, when faced with the lack of mobilization and organization in their area of coverage, seek to integrate into a neighboring region, thus reconfiguring regionalization. Fetamce undertook a strategy of articulation in 2007 with the purpose of strengthening the unions affiliated with its base. This initiative outlined a regionalization model that aimed to align Union policy at municipal levels and involve the working class in localities where there was no union representation. During this period, the federation adopted the project “affiliate, create and revitalize.”

To implement these actions, seminars were promoted in ten municipalities of Ceará (Fortaleza, Quixadá, Limoeiro do Norte, Sobral, Itapipoca, Crateús, Crato, São Benedito, Baturité and Iguatu), contributing to the geographical outline that currently subsists. At these meetings, conjuncture analysis, diagnostics, evaluation of the activities undertaken and the formulation of an action plan were conducted. This mobilization was crucial to develop strategies to strengthen the trade union movement, focusing on areas such as training, trade union organization and strategic policies, with the aim of building and consolidating regional structures.

The process of internalization of the Federation, which led to its growth and the strengthening of the organization of municipal public servants, began to be built by several hands, becoming undeniable and noticeable the contributions of women union leaders to the execution of union policy through the foundation of unions in municipalities that did not yet exist and the direction of the political organization of the struggle in existing unions.

The growth of the federation and the strengthening of the organization of municipal public servants result, as previously stated, from a policy of internalization that, despite the peculiarities existing in the municipalities of Ceará, unifies several agendas, transcends the state of Ceará and results in the implementation of joint campaigns, such as the unified salary campaign. Fetamce's entire union policy is centered on the objective of strengthening the articulation of the organization of workers in the municipal Public Service. This orientation arises as a response to the urgent need to face the withdrawal of rights promoted by municipal administrations.

State anti-union practices, especially at municipal levels, can be seen as part of a broader strategy to reduce costs and make work more flexible, often at the expense of workers' rights and dignity. Souza (2017) discusses how Brazilian elites perpetuate narratives that justify inequality and delegitimize workers' rights, strengthening the stigma that public service workers are maharajas. This discourse, widely delivered by representatives of the centrist, right-wing and especially far-right parties, portrays these workers as individuals who work little and receive high wages. However, this view is contradictory to the reality of the municipalities of Ceará, where the vast majority of public servants receive minimum remuneration.

It should be noted that most of the municipalities of Ceará have not yet outsourced the services performed by auxiliaries of general services and watchmen, numerous and salaried categories, which are users of state services to which they contribute with the execution. However, contradictorily, they are often denied their social rights when they need them. This

denial of rights is not limited only to salaried servants, but affects the vast majority of the population.

When the trade union movement manages to transform society through the politicization of its base and society through its agendas of struggle, the rise of anti-union practices is commonly observed. These practices are not restricted only to the municipal branch, and are even sometimes regulated by federal legislation. This contributes to the demobilization of the trade union movement, leading to the disarticulation of some entities for certain periods or indefinitely, and even inhibiting the presence of trade unions in some territories.

In the state of Ceará, for example, some municipalities have not even managed to mobilize and organize the working class as a result of authoritarianism, oppression and persecution of leaders, imposed by local political leaders. This proximity relationship that occurs in municipalities favors the denial of rights and the rise of privileges that have the durability of a management, being a very common practice to leave workers submissive to local political leaders.

By opposing the interests of the holders of political and economic power and fulfilling their role in defending the rights of workers, union leaders and collective representation entities begin to face, on a recurring basis, practices of an anti-union nature, designed to weaken their political and organizational performance. Among the most frequent are the suspension of transfers of associative contributions discounted in payroll, duly authorized by municipal servants, and the withdrawal or denial of Union releases intended for leaders who are fully dedicated to union activity.

The interruption of these transfers directly compromises the main source of financing of the basic unions, since the statutory contributions, mandatory to the affiliated workers, vary, in general, between 1% and 2% of the base or total remuneration, also focusing on the thirteenth salary, according to the statute of each entity. It is therefore a measure that not only financially weakens the unions, but also has a knock-on effect on higher-level entities, such as Fetamce, to which many of these unions are affiliated. Similarly, the suppression of trade union freedoms, even if provided for in specific municipal legislation, constitutes a violation not only of these local norms, but also of the constitutional principles that ensure trade union freedom and organization, significantly compromising the ability of the trade union movement to act.

The temporary or definitive suspension of the payroll discount of associative contributions can lead to the disarticulation of entities, especially when they start to act in isolation and distanced from the Federation. The option of isolation, often taken by deliberation

restricted to the executive board or even by individual decision of managers, tends to further weaken the entity, since it removes it from a collective network of solidarity, political formation and strategies to confront anti-union practices. Such distance prevents the sharing of experiences, campaigns and legal and political orientations promoted by the Federation, increasing the risk of strategic misunderstandings and decisions that, instead of strengthening, weaken the collective struggle of the working class.

In addition, it is important to note that this departure from the Federation, an entity of a higher degree, is often carried out without dialogue with the base and without formalization of disaffiliation, which results in the accumulation of statutory contribution debts. This contribution constitutes one of the duties of the affiliated unions, as established in the statute of the institution of higher education. With regard to funding, it is up to the base unions to ensure the necessary resources. At the General Meeting, the basic entities have the power to decide on affiliation or disaffiliation, this being the maximum decision-making body. Before the labor reform, which took place after the 2016 coup, the financing of higher grade entities<sup>4</sup>, like Fetamce, was largely derived from the first degree entities<sup>5</sup> and the transfer of the mandatory union contribution. In the case of Fetamce, its bylaws provided for monthly contributions since its foundation. Some entities chose to accumulate these monthly fees and carried out their statutory obligations bimonthly or semiannually.

The percentages of contributions were fixed at 5% for entities not affiliated to the CUT or any other trade union center, and at 1.2% for basic entities affiliated to the CUT. These percentages were adjusted during the 2022 statutory reform, which took place at the X Ordinary Post-Labor Reform Congress. After the aforementioned labor reform, Fetamce makes adjustments to the financing as a way to ensure the operation and its performance, modifying the percentages of monthly contributions and carrying out awareness campaigns for the statutory compliance by the unions of its base.

It is important to note that all deliberations and statutory changes are carried out at ordinary or extraordinary congresses, that of financing was a fundamental strategy to maintain the entity occurred on 29/06 to 02/07 of 2022 at the Ordinary Congress mentioned above. Generally in the vicinity of congresses, some entities that are in default, for some reason, are

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<sup>4</sup> It is an essential organizational structure for the Union and defense of the collective interests of workers at the regional, state, national or international level, acting as a representative and influential voice in the trade union and political context, such as federations, confederations and trade union centers.

<sup>5</sup> Degree trade union entity is one that directly represents workers of a certain category or profession at the local, municipal or regional level.

regularized in order to have a direct voice and vote in the deliberations that articulate the political performance of the entity. It is important to emphasize that this regularization always occurs with a great mobilization of the Federation.

The monthly contributions of the basic entities, considering percentages on the income of the basic Union, become crucial for the survival of the Federation, which with the labor “deform” and the destruction of rights contained in it, the entity loses more than 90% of its income. The contributory percentages are related to the Central Union to which the basic union is affiliated, and the unions that are affiliated to the CUT have part of the contribution of the central made by the basic entity of the Federation returns the same of the monthly contributions paid by the unions to the federation, in this way the *cutista* unions contribute with a percentage of 5%, being lower than the entities affiliated to other central or that are not affiliated to any central, incurring a percentage 8.8% of their monthly income. It should be noted that there is an extra contribution to be made in the month of June to the federation set at 10% of the monthly amount of the collection of the affiliated unions.

With regard to the territorial base, the state of Ceará has 184 municipalities, of which approximately 22 do not have a specific Union in the field of municipal servants or have deeply disjointed entities. Still, even in municipalities where there is no formal affiliation, Fetamce maintains political accompaniment and makes itself available to guide, support union reorganization processes and act in local struggles. Among formally affiliated unions, the existence of periods of default is recurrent, either due to objective financial difficulties or due to the limited understanding that union policy can be built in isolation. Not infrequently, the regularization of contributions occurs on the eve of the congresses of the federation, due to the statutory need to be in place to guarantee the right to voice and vote, a process that, in general, involves intense mobilization and political dialogue from the Federation.

In this sense, it is essential to reaffirm that, just as workers support their grassroots unions, Fetamce depends directly on the contribution and political commitment of its union base. Financing is not restricted to an administrative or accounting dimension, but constitutes a central element of autonomy, the capacity for collective organization and the support of an articulated union action, in solidarity and effectively committed to the defense of the rights of the working class.

## Final considerations

Anchored in qualitative methodology, this academic production presents significant contributions to the geography of work from a critical perspective. In order to analyze the historicization of the trade union movement in line with the particularities of trade unionism in the state of Ceará, the research points to the complex power dynamics and strategies used to weaken the trade union movement in Brazil, particularly among Ceará public servants.

It has been observed that anti-union practices, economic reprisals and legislative restrictions have a profound impact on the ability of trade unions to protect and promote workers' rights. The survival and effectiveness of trade unions depend on a strong network of solidarity and the ability to adapt to legislative and economic changes. Anti-union practices and stigmatizing narratives pose significant challenges, but with organization, mobilization, and awareness, the trade union movement can continue to play a vital role in defending workers' rights and promoting social justice.

The historical trajectory of the trade union movement in Brazil reveals a journey of struggles and achievements, characterized by moments of resistance and significant advances in the consolidation of rights, going beyond the labor scope. However, when analyzing the organization of workers in the municipal Public Service of Ceará, specific challenges emerge. Although there are similarities in the 184 municipalities of Ceará, each one presents its peculiarities.

The investigation of the power relations established by political leaders, both within the state and in the Metropolitan Region of Fortaleza and in the capital itself, reveals that, in certain historical periods, oppression and exploitation intensified. In this context, the use of the state as an instrument to strengthen political groups is observed, aiming to perpetuate the dependence of the people in relation to the leaders who hold political and economic power. This proximity in some municipalities inhibits the organization of workers.

One of the strategies adopted by Fetamce to strengthen the struggle of municipal servants in Ceará was the regionalization of the Ceará territory. While there are similarities across the state, some regions still maintain more archaic political practices, which results in a lack of working class organization. When organizing occurs, in addition to resistance against the withdrawal of rights, workers face persecution, threats to leadership and anti-union actions.

In this sense, by conducting the research it was possible to infer that gender issues are embedded in Brazilian trade unionism, so that the female struggle for the effectiveness of

quality service is marked by structural challenges and an institutional and political culture of a macho and misogynistic nature. This reverberates directly and indirectly in the manner of social organization of trade unions and federations.

Thus, there is a great female role in the union struggle, even in the face of the reproduction of stigmas and stereotypes by heralds of an archaic and conservative policy. In theory, considering the research, the theoretical and methodological framework was expanded, subsidized in critical readings of the facts of the social fabric. Therefore, the text allows new paths and research questions to be traced, aiming to reflect on trade unionism in Brazil and immersion in gender discussions.

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