

Abstracts

Dossier: Trade unions in the era of globalisation. Coordinated by José Babiano and Javier Tébar

Ubaldo Martinez Veiga

Informal economy, labour and trade union experiences in India and Nigeria

This article is an attempt to update some notions on the meaning of informal work. From 1973 to the mid-eighties, studies on work and the informal economy were at boiling point. Subsequently there were many empirical studies carried out which were often repeated with little creativity. When some cases presented novel aspects, they were studied in more detail. First, it was observed that many informal workers are unionized, occasionally more often than formal workers. Moreover, informal activity often maintains its autonomy. Workers resist being absorbed into formal employment systems. This inclusion regularly brings them many disadvantages. Another important element appearing in informal work is its active and creative nature. This context gives rise to a social class that confronts the State demanding human rights, which being general rights, are of great importance. Informal work is a system that allows subsistence and resistance to homogenization, which neoliberalism covertly represents in a way that its instrument of penetration into society is called globalisation.

Keywords: Informal work, Poverty, Economic development, new systems of protest, Subsistence techniques, Human rights, Worker rights.

Isidor Boix and Fernando Rocha

China and Vietnam: the transition from “official” to “real” unionism

The Chinese and Vietnamese trade unions are facing a transition phase within a context of implementation of the market economy in both countries and its integration into the global world economy. Processes of industrial action are already taken place, exceeding the “official” political and union structures, with a great uncertainty about their future developments and outcomes. This article addresses a critical view of this phenomenon, based on the experience of union cooperation between European unions and the unions of both countries and on the findings from specific research developed in Vietnam.

Keywords: China, Vietnam, transition, official unionism, free unionism

Patrícia Vieira Trópia and Davisson C. Cangussu de Souza

Brazilian trade unionism faces neoliberal capitalism – alliances and disputes between CUT and Força Sindical, 1990-2015

This article brings up the *Força Sindical* – FS (Trade Union Force) and the *Central Única dos Trabalhadores* – CUT (Unified Workers’ Centre) guidelines and actions during neoliberal governments in Brazil from 1990 up to 2015. Its main purpose is to discuss the disputes and alliances between the two mentioned national trade union centres as well as the programmatic changes, including in its basis, considerably motivated not only by the positions taken in face of the neoliberal policies, but also for the kind of relation established with the government in the presented period of time. In order to carry out our analysis, we went through a review about Brazil’s trade unionism studies and checked up congress resolutions of both national trade union centres.

Keywords: Trade unionism in Brazil; Neoliberalism; Lula’s and Cardoso’s governments; CUT and Força Sindical

Rodrigo Araya Gómez

The trajectory of the Chilean labour movement during the governments of the Concertación. Framework agreement on strike subcontractors of CODELCO, 1990-2010

The article analyses the trajectory of the Chilean labour movement during the new democratic period, specifically the action of the United Workers Central (CUT). We argue that the unions faced a complex scenario because of the characteristics of the transitional democratic process, marked by the dictatorial heritage with a structural position of weakness as an effect of the neoliberal model. In response, CUT went from a position of cooperation with a democratic confrontation because of dissatisfaction with the results of incomplete democracy governments, becoming a reference opposition to neoliberalism.

Keywords: Unionism, transition, labour reform, neoliberalism

José-Angel Calderón

What is the nature of the crisis in French unionism? A reading from the perspective of models of production

The gradual change in the model of production since the 1970s produced a heterogenization and polarization of workers’ terms of employment—between, on the one hand, a segment of workers with stable employment, legal protection and good representation by the unions and on the other hand an increasingly populous segment of peripheral workers who were cut off collective bargaining and whose terms of employment were “negotiated”

individually when they were hired. By this analysis, it is not so much the institutionalization of French unionism that lies behind its crisis as the de-institutionalization of the wage relationship, one of the conditions of which seems to be the weakening of the union itself. The unions find themselves in a situation where they alone are opposing an increased riskiness in labour relations that, while distancing them from the peripheral segments of the workforce, is locking them into defensive positions.

Keywords: Unionism; France; institutionalization; industrial relations.

Miguel Martínez Lucio

Trade union renewal and responses to neoliberalism and the politics of austerity in the United Kingdom: the curious incubation of the political in labour relations

One of the problems we have when discussing trade unions today, the role of collective action and the academically fashionable question of renewal or revitalisation is that we discuss it in terms of trade unions themselves and in isolation. However, trade unions exist within context and those contexts are political, social and economic, and historical. The remaking of trade unions in the UK has been in the main a solitary project which has had goods intentions and been viewed by many observers as being highly innovative; but these are first steps which require resources, coordination, conviction and politics let alone state support. Yet trade unions and many networks of trade unionists have in some sense incubated and guarded the map of social and emancipatory possibilities in terms of the political and the social in curious if unsupported ways. They have stepped into a reframing of the left even if the outcomes remain very uncertain.

Keywords: unionism; neoliberalism; United Kingdom; globalisation; political innovation.

Pere J. Beneyto

Impact of the crisis on associative resources of trade unionism. The Spanish case study

There is great consensus in specialized research regarding the interaction of different power resources of the trade unions within the framework of labour relations, distinguishing between those of a *structural* (position in the labour market), *associative* (membership and representation) and *institutional* (participation in collective bargaining and social dialogue) nature. This article reviews the most relevant theoretical approaches and empirical evidence regarding these relations, making special reference to the impact of the crisis on the associative resources (structure and evolution of direct membership and the electoral audience) of Spanish trade unionism.

Keywords: crisis, labour market, trade unions, membership, representation

Miscelanea

Jesper Hamark

From peak to trough: Swedish strikes and lockouts in the first half of the twentieth century

Sweden is renowned for its peaceful industrial relations during the post-WWII years. But in the first three decades of the twentieth century Sweden was struck by extensive labour and employer militancy. The internationally established explanation for this transformation from peak to trough is the seizing of governmental power by the social democrats in the 1930s. Instead I claim that the development of, and the shifting balance of power between, the major working class ideologies—communism, syndicalism and social democracy—was an important factor in the decline of industrial strife.

Keywords: strikes, lockouts, labour ideology, power resources hypothesis, left opposition within the labour movement