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## Abstracts

**Dossier: Mass strikes in the global crisis.** Coordinated by Alexander Gallas and Jörg Nowak

Hugo Dias and Lídia Fernandes

**The November 2012 general strike and anti-austerity protests – analysis from the Portuguese case**

Opposition against austerity was the cornerstone of the protests which took place since 2010. In Portugal, the first signs of mobilization came from the trade unions, although the emergence of new actors allowed the movement to widen its social influence. This article reflects on the Portuguese contribution to the transnational general strike on the 14 November 2012 in order to explore its insertion in this period's contentious politics, not only regarding its transnational dimension – within the European Union framework –, but also concerning the relationship between different actors – particularly between trade unions and new political actors. While facing a political agenda aimed at implementing major changes to the regime of labour and social policies, the unions encountered increased challenges regarding the use of their ultimate instrument of struggle – strikes –, especially with consideration to its bases of power, which were already quite weakened ahead of this cycle of mobilization.

**Keywords:** 14 November 2012; Portugal; general strike; transnational collective action; austerity

Maria Gorosarri and Luciole Sauviat

**The Uneven Development of (Mass) Strikes in France and Spain**

This article analyses the strikes in recent years against the dominant government strategies of crisis management in France and Spain. It argues

that there is a marked difference in the dynamics of the strikes in these two countries: whereas the stoppages in Spain came close to a mass strike in a Luxemburgian sense with new forms of working class consciousness and organisation emerging, the same cannot be said of France.

Stefanie Hürtgen

**Authoritarian Defence of the German Model? Conflicts on the freedom of collective bargaining and militant strikes in the German railway sector**

This article argues that the recent strike wave in the railway sector can be seen as a reflection of a deep-seated social crisis in the country. This crisis was born out of the deregulation and fragmentation of labour relations, and is reflected in the privatisation and marketisation of the German railway system. The “small” train drivers’ union GdL successfully led the opposition against the changes and did so by using the strike weapon. When the Merkel government responded by cracking down on the right to strike for smaller unions with a new law, the GdL managed to bypass this crackdown.

Jörg Nowak

**Class Coalitions or struggles within the working class? Social unrest in India and Brazil during the global crisis**

Here we compare strikes and their links to political protest movements in Brazil and India. We highlight the fact that large strike waves in the automobile industry (India) and the construction and public sectors (Brazil) preceded the emergence of political protest movements with significant middle-class involvement. These movements were directed against corruption and also, in the Brazilian case, against public transport fare hikes, the state of the public sector and the government in general. A key difference was that workers in India were more politicised than workers in Brazil; however, for the street protests, the reverse was true: Whereas the Indian activists just lambasted corruption, the Brazilian movement had a broader political agenda.

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Luis Campos and Bruno Dobrusin

### **Labour conflict in Argentina and Brazil: challenging an alliance?**

The rising number of labour conflicts in Argentina and Brazil over the recent years is a sign of changing times for the dominant pattern of labour-state relations in both countries during the last decade. This paper addresses the issue of labour conflict analyzing the available data on both countries, and providing a broad explanation of the reasons behind the rising conflicts in the field of labour over the last three years.

**Key Words:** Trade Unions; Strikes; Latin America

Tim Pringle

### **Strikes and labour relations in China**

Over the last decade, strikes have emerged as an important instrument of workers' agency in China. This paper discusses the evolution of strikes, the demands of strikers, the constraints and opportunities for labour militants who organise them as well as the main ways in which they are resolved. In doing so, I present an analysis of their impact on the evolving framework for labour relations. I argue that the combination of a rise in the frequency of strikes and the institutional particularities of this framework including the absence of trade union plurality and no tradition in collective bargaining has generated two connected outcomes. On the one hand, it has generated efforts by the Party-led All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) to improve its representative credibility and on the other hand, the strikes have facilitated the emergence of an alternative layer of workers' representatives often with the support of labour NGOs. While careful to avoid directly challenging the monopolistic position of the ACFTU, the ongoing militancy suggests that the numbers of such representatives and their influence on labour relations is likely to increase.

**Key words:** strikes, ACFTU, workers' representatives, elections, labour relations.

Hermes Augusto Costa and Hugo Dias

### **The strike as a challenge to the North and to the South**

The authors take up the theme of the "general strike", which is discussed in several of the other articles, and do so by engaging in a comparison across the North/South divide that focuses on Portugal and India. In their view, the general strike is a defensive form of struggle in the neoliberal age chosen

because other means of influencing political decision-making are absent. In the Portuguese case, the strikes took place against the backdrop of the imposition of austerity through governments and the troika; in the Indian case, the background was the liberalisation of the economy and the insensitivity of governments to union demands in a situation of general economic insecurity. All in all, Costa and Dias say that unions in the north have much to learn from unions in the south in the sense that they have to reach out to marginalised and precarious sectors of the population.

### **Miscelanea**

Ravi Ghadge

#### **Understanding the Bombay Textile Strike of 1982-1983**

The Bombay Textile Strike of 1982-1983 is a watershed moment in India's labour history. It was one of India's longest strikes involving more than 200,000 workers who collectively stopped work for more than eighteen months. However, there are relatively few studies that have analyzed the strike from the workers' perspectives. Based on an interpretive grounded theoretical analysis of interviews of former textile workers and residents of the textile mill district, this paper analyses the meanings produced by the workers surrounding the strike within a long-term historical process of working class formation in Bombay. The paper supports the idea that a critical analysis of labour conflicts in India must go beyond the workplace, taking into account the social context of the neighborhood.

**Key words:** Bombay Textile Strike, Mumbai, Working Class, Girangaon, India