

Break or weld? trade union responses to global value chain restructuring

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a short introduction to this volume, sketching out some of the main dilemmas confronting trade unions in the context of global value chain restructuring, discussing some of the alternative strategies currently being adopted around the world and summarising the contributions to this volume.

Globalisation and trade unions: towards a multi-level strategy?

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ABSTRACT

International trade unionism is facing a serious challenge from what is commonly called globalisation. Trade unions feel the need to 'scale up' their activities beyond their, once paramount, national terrain and to challenge capital's untrammelled forward march internationalising and commodifying everything in its path. This article examines the new forms of labour internationalism and the way in which trade unions have been creating incipient counter-hegemonic strategies. The only certainty in this globalised and complex situation is that a continuation of national era trade union strategies is not a viable path. A possible 'transformationalist' alternative is posed in this paper, arguing that labour needs a multi-layered and flexible response to the new global capitalist order.

Trade unions and worker movements in the North American communications industries

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a project that examines trends in North American labour movements, and specifically in the workforce, in the converging communications, culture, and information technology sectors. Drawing on documentary evidence and interviews, the paper concentrates on two important developments: efforts to unify workers across the knowledge and communication industries, and the rise of worker movements that operate in conjunction with, but outside, the formal trade union structure. The paper begins by situating these developments within debates about labour in a 'post-industrial', 'information', or 'network' society. It describes the challenges facing workers in the knowledge sector, especially rapid technological change, massive corporate consolidation, the rise of the neo-liberal state and divisions between cultural and technical workers in the knowledge sector. The paper proceeds to describe how North American workers are responding within the traditional trade union system, primarily through forms of consolidation or trade union convergence (such as the Communication Workers of America), and also through worker movements operating outside the traditional trade union system in the information technology and cultural sectors (for example WashTech and the National Writers Union). The paper concludes by addressing the significance of these developments. Do they portend a rebirth of North American labour activism or do they represent its last gasps?

Multinationals' Policies and Local Responses: findings from cross-national case studies in Germany, France and the USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the complex interaction between globalisation practices of multinational corporations and the governing potential of response by local systems of employment regulation in light of rationalisation processes linked to financial market driven strategies. It investigates this issue by looking at optimisation programmes conceived and developed at the central headquarters of two German multinational companies and then traces their implementation at local sites in three different international settings: Germany, the USA and France. A central focus was the role that industrial relations systems play in the transformation process and whether (or how) the response varies according to the strength and coordination of the institutionalised system

of industrial relations. The study shows that differences still remain in the form and strength of the industrial relations systems in these three countries. However, in all three cases, a new development in industrial relations is taking place in which areas potentially relevant for bargaining are left 'unoccupied'. That is, they are missed completely in the traditional negotiating agendas of industrial relations actors.

Risking relegation or staying in the first league? industrial relations and enterprise restructuring in Germany under the impact of globalisation and financialisation

Jürgen Kädtler

Jürgen Kädtler is the director of the Sociological Research Institute (SOFI) in Göttingen in Germany.

ABSTRACT

The 'dual system' of industrial relations has formed a crucial component of the 'German Model' of post war capitalism. However it has come under severe pressure since the ending of the 'Golden Age' of Fordism and both nations and companies have been forced to engage with the new demands of globalisation. The focus of this article is on one important aspect of this development: the impact of organisational globalisation in large companies on industrial relations and on employees' bargaining power, drawing on research in the German chemical, pharmaceutical and automotive industries. It is argued that whether employees' primary power will erode, persist, or even increase depends critically on companies' product strategies. The article draws attention to ways in which employees' bargaining positions may be eroded either because the traditional strategies of unions and works councils make it difficult to draw on primary power at a local level or because primary power is shifting to new groups of employees who were traditionally not well organised. However it also points to some ways in which bargaining has been successful under these new circumstances

Brazilian unions face globalisation: learning to negotiate in regional blocs and global networks

Leonardo Mello e Silva

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how Brazilians trade unions have been reacting to globalisation by analysing their participation in two different, though interrelated, initiatives. The first of these is the process of implementation of the Mercosul Southern Cone Common Market and the prominent role the unions played within it from its inception. The focus here is on how trade unions boosted the social agenda as a core issue in Mercosul's integration policy. The second initiative is the development of international company-based union networks which are now widespread in Brazil. What will be considered in both cases is the increasing importance of the actual practice of negotiation for the ongoing pattern of labour relations in Brazil, whether this is between state agencies and workers' representatives, or between companies and their own workers. The paper points to the difficulties and opportunities for the union movement in each case.

New industrial areas, old workers' solidarities: the browning of the auto industry multinationals' green field sites in Brazil

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Marco Aurelio Santana is an Associate Professor in the Graduate Program in Sociology and Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the ways in which auto workers in Southern Rio de Janeiro State in Brazil have successfully managed to build solidarity with their colleagues in the traditional locations of the auto industry in Brazil in the so-called ABC region near São Paulo, as well as in other parts of the world. This demonstrates the limitations of companies' strategies of seeking 'green field' sites in order to take advantage of low wages and introduce new working concepts such as 'lean production'. When unions are able to build effective links with workers on 'brown field' sites then these strategies can be subverted.

Technomadic Work: From Promotional Vision to WashTech's Opposition

Michelle Rodino-Colocino

Michelle Rodino-Colocino is an Assistant Professor of Film/Video Media in the College of Communications at Pennsylvania State University, USA.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine 'technomadic', or 'technomediated' mobile work at the levels of labour process and labour market. It investigates the promise of technomadic work at the level of the labour process, analyses the exploitation of technomadic work at the level of the labour market, and presents an instructive case study of the ways in which US workers are collectively struggling against such arrangements through the high-tech workers' union WashTech, the Washington Alliance of Technology Workers. The following analysis remedies gaps in the literature on technology and work by examining two overlooked phenomena: firstly the way in which the production of mobile labour markets contradicts the liberatory promise of technomadic labour processes; and secondly, workers' collective action against exploitation in the mobile, global labour market. By combining methods that interpret meanings within texts about labour processes with an empirical overview of trends regarding the labour market, this essay aims to contribute to the productive conversation between research in political economy and in cultural studies and to an understanding of divergence between the representations and experiences of technomadic work.

Towards strategies for making offshore outsourcing economically and socially sustainable

Monique Ramioul and Tom De Bruyn

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the role trade unions and employee representatives can play in workplaces where offshoring and outsourcing projects are introduced. Starting with an overview of the literature on the employment impacts of offshore outsourcing, it highlights a strong contrast between the generally optimistic macro-economic studies focusing on the net effects, and the realities of offshore projects revealed through case studies, in which failure and mismanagement are common. It describes a situation in which increasing numbers of European trade unions, acknowledging that offshore outsourcing is 'here to stay', have reacted to this situation by developing a more pro-active approach to the introduction of outsourcing and offshoring which seeks to avoid the negative impacts on employees of failed or badly managed offshore outsourcing projects. Finally, the paper discusses the MOOS (Making Offshore Outsourcing Sustainable) project which exemplified this approach, aiming at contributing to a better informed and more effective role for employee

representatives, to enable them to assess and influence the offshore outsourcing practices of their employers.

South African trade unions and globalisation: going for the 'high road', getting stuck on the 'low road'

Marlea Clarke and Carolyn Bassett

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Carolyn Bassett is an assistant professor at the School of Social Sciences at York University in Toronto in Canada.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we assess the South African labour movement's engagement with globalisation in the 1990s and its implications for labour politics in the following decade. Drawing on extensive archival research and interviews with key informants, we show that, although the labour movement had become committed to a 'high road', post-Keynesian restructuring vision by 1993, its representatives failed to pursue that vision consistently in the economic policy negotiations that preceded the historic 1994 democratic election. In fact, labour delegates actually agreed to several policy changes that were more in line with a 'low road', neo-liberal approach, with dramatic implications for workers in some sectors. The inability of labour's engagement with globalisation to benefit the working class has led to a long search for a new basis for union strategy.

Solidarity across cyberspace: Internet campaigning, labour activism and the re- making of trade union internationalism

Bruce Robinson

Bruce Robinson is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Informatics Research Institute at the University of Salford in the UK.

ABSTRACT

Global communication through the Internet has provided new possibilities for trade union solidarity action across national boundaries. Email campaigns are one form

of this. Taking the example of an email campaign in support of imprisoned Eritrean trade unionists, this paper examines the social organisation and information flows underlying such campaigns. These throw light on the effectiveness of such actions, their capacity to overcome inequalities in access to ICTs and current debates on the role of the Internet in the remaking of trade union internationalism managing to develop a certain social power.

The Movement for the Abolition of Child Labour as an Example of a Transnational Network Movement

Patrick Develtere and An Huybrechs

Patrick Develtere is the General Director of the Higher Institute for Labour Studies at the Catholic University of Leuven.

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of a global network society, movements and social organisations acquire a new place and space in development. A wide range of actors, including international non-governmental organisations and transnational coalitions, are reacting in a variety of ways to new domestic and global challenges. Separated from traditional social movements, such as trade unions, new forms of collective action have emerged on the international scene which can be described as ‘transnational network movements’. This paper discusses the differences in ideology, practice, and organisation between traditional social movements and these new network movements, using the movement for the abolition of child labour as an example. The history of this movement, the actors involved and its repertoire of actions illustrate clearly that transnational network movements are very dynamic and open environments in which a wide variety of national and international organisations and movements, as well as institutions, corporations and individuals, can choose their own level of involvement whilst managing to develop a certain social power.

Review article: reflections on international labour studies in the UK

Peter Waterman

Peter Waterman, formerly a Senior Lecturer at the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, is an independent research and writer specialising in labour and internationalism.

ABSTRACT

Reflecting personally on the contribution of the UK to international labour studies over the past forty years and his own role in this history, Peter Waterman reviews some recent publications and websites from both inside and outside the official trade union movement. These are:

Tony Pilch (ed) *Trades Unions and Globalisation*, London: Smith Institute. 86 pp. ISBN 1-905370-14-8

Sheila Cohen, *Ramparts of Resistance: Why Workers Lost Their Power and How to Get it Back*, London: Pluto, 248 pp. ISBN 13-978-0-7453-1529-4 (pb)

Ronaldo Munck, 2006. *Globalisation and Contestation: The Great Counter-Movement*, London: Routledge. 176 pp. ISBN-10 0415376564

Angela Hale and Jane Wills (eds). *Threads of Labour: Garment Industry Supply Chains from the Workers' Perspective*, Oxford: Blackwell, 288 pp. ISBN-10: 1405126388

Paul Mason, *Live Working or Die Fighting: How the Working Class Went Global*, London: Harvill Secker. 304 pp. ISBN 978-0-436-20615-3

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