

Transformations in the work and in the unionism

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Many are the debates on the “turn of the century.” This expression conveys a general feeling of perplexity over the transformations underway in the world. Actually, the great turn of the century has already happened (this was a short century, begun with a delay in 1914, with the first World War and ended earlier in 1989). In a certain way, the current transformations were already operating covertly in the 70s, or in the *annus mirabilis* of 1968. It brought about, for sure, a complex and deeply adverse world for the workers.

In Europe, the capitalist counteroffensive began in the 60s. Its axes were the universalization process and introduction of information technology in the production. The unionism could not realize, then, the extension and the depth of the transformations in the production. When it did, it was quite late. Through the information technology and of the universalization of the money market, the leading groups of the capital redesigned the knowledge and the representation of the work in the productive process, causing a deep crisis of the mass parties, of the unions, and challenging the form State-Nation.

In methodology terms, this complexity and depth of the crisis demand a vision that incorporates longer temporality and deeper contradictions.

The transformations affect radically two areas of the modern world:

1. The worlds of the work
2. The field of the State-Nation

The first area refers to the field of the productive restructuring; the second, to the area of the territory, of the cities, of the public policies. The first requires the analysis of the sphere of the production, of the current stage of the “Capital”; the second, analysis at level of the space-territory, of the social reproduction. As a whole, the phenomenon that Milton Santos calls “technical-informational system.”

At the current development of the capitalist system, the world of work is the object of transformation in the widest process of restructuring of the production organization, the productive restructuring. The changes are so profound and radical that it seems to be a

“revenge” of the capital in relation to the work. A new form of global capitalism arises, very different from the multinational capitalism.

One of the main signs of this history, of the globalization of the capitalism, is the development of the capital in general, extending beyond markets and boundaries, political systems and national projects, regionalisms and geopolitics, cultures and civilizations.

At the center of the process lies the crisis of the world of work, the technological revolution underway. In many aspects, at a time of globalization of the world, the problem of work arises again. What characterizes the world of work at the end of the 20th century is that it has become really global. The globalization of the world of work takes place in the same scale as compared to the globalization of the capitalism.. As the globalization of the capitalism, seen as civilizing process, reaches the whole of human society, the social and mental frameworks are broken. This “disorder of the work” influences all the social life: new sociability forms, new types of individualism, new religions, representation crisis, violence and barbarism rise. The whole of the institutions (union, party, school, family, State, Nation..) are affected by the restructuring of the production process. For instance: in the world of the work, the notions of Space, Time and Function are being altered profoundly, leading to a revision of the relationship between the time and the nature of work.

The extension of the transformations underway sets us to think of the period analyzed by M. Foucault: the passage from the “Classical Age to Modern Age”, when the “birth of the work” modified the social order, and generated a “new *episteme*”, affecting the nature, the methods and the functions of the knowledge. Therefore, the current period is not the first in which the “crisis of the work” is talked about. In all the big structural crises (the end of the 17th century, the end of the 19th century, the first 15 years of the 20th century, the period between the two World Wars, particularly during the 1930 crisis) the work was at the center of reflections.

The new technologies produce global cultural impacts on the society as a whole and, particularly, on the workers. The labor flexibility involves internal and external rearrangement of the working class, nationally, regionally and worldwide. The sociability patterns, cultural life and consciousness are modified, at the same time as the organization conditions, mobilization and claiming attitudes.

These technologies constitute an old desire of the humanity, that is, the human emancipation from the manual work, the reduction of the working day, the free time, larger productivity of labor, among others. However, its implementation has been producing structural

unemployment, mass exclusion, disorganization of the families by the flexible shifts and the disorganization of the workers.

There is a dominant ideological discourse on the beneficial effects of the financial globalization. However, in the world economy, the growth was not resumed; it was much larger in the 60s and 70s than the last years even with the technological progresses. Thus, the concentration of wealth had an exclusion and polarization effects all over the world. The unemployment rose, above all, among the young workers. However, unemployment and globalization are not synonymous; the most globalized economies in the world, USA and Japan, have the lowest rates of unemployment. Technological revolution is not synonymous of unemployment; in most countries, the unemployed people are not from the technologically advanced and computerized sectors, but from sectors weakened by the absence of growth of the world economy.

Some important axes result from all this: the crisis of the industrial civilization and the transformation of the work value. The world globalization expresses a new cycle of expansion of the capitalism, as a mode of production and civilizing process worldwide. The future heads to a dual fragmentation of the society with the marginalization consequences and social exclusion; the unemployment and the poor work benefits and regulation, with structural character.

In Brazil, an “essence of the neo-liberalism” (“a destruction program of the collective structures capable of fighting the logic of the pure market”, P. Bourdieu), expresses itself, specifically, in the field of the State-Nation, in a virtually hegemonic alliance, among the groups, classes and leading classes, possibly the first most consistent leading class since “the 1930 revolution”.

In the field of worlds of work, it expresses itself in a “conservative modernization” of the productive structures, combining the several work forms (slavery, fordist, post-fordist, etc.), resulting in the unemployment and in the “exclusion” of thousands of workers. The main objective of the capitalist association counteroffensive, begun in the 90s, is to dismantle the base of the experience in the field of the praxis of the collective organization through the labor flexibility of the work.

The citizen union

The transformations in the world of work and in the world of life lead us to rethink the trade union movement. In what perspective? In the perspective the unionism has as increasingly

important role in the society; a social unionism and with more solidarity, integrated with the citizenship, both in the factories and in the cities. An organic union but also citizen, that represents the workers and that becomes social movement, that can cope with the challenges of the capitalism as the mode of production and civilizing process. Integrating work and environment, work and education, work and feminism, work and culture, work and well-being, work and youth, work and the best age.

This new unionism requires an integration of the working class consciousness with the consciousness of the citizenship. The citizenship outside the world calls the trade union for movement to strengthen new social movements which lie outside the process of the production. Just like democracy should enter the workplaces, the unionism should embrace the citizenship, the public, democratic and popular space. The privileged space of the unionism has been the company and the profession (the union and the federation). Today, the geographical aspect at the local level tends to assume a larger field. At the local level, the unionism should participate in the democratic debate, in the city administration, that is, to have an active presence in the local life.

In this perspective, the unionism should go through deep transformations. We can highlight some aspects:

- In the face of the current challenges, the unionism should change, above all, should join in with the struggle of the civil society. In the face of the globalization process, it should build new solidarity bonds. This is a new territory for the trade union movement, implying a true “cultural revolution”, i.e., to abandon certain conception of representation and hiring that was decisive when its main objective was the conquest of the monopoly of the hiring in the companies. How to build a collective hiring process that also assumes the interests of sectors of the “excluded” population and workers, in several fields: housing, social security, minimum wage, education, health, transports, adolescents, etc.?
- This revolution in the corporate union culture also involves the forms of organization of the unionism. Thus, a unionism structured in the vertical organizations will hardly represent organically or politically the world of those who are in the informal sector, in unemployment, scattered in the territory. It demands an enormous quality leap, that is, considering its organization at the territorial level; articulating in a new historical perspective the dimension of the territory and of the interprofessional organization; articulating the “organic union” with the “union citizen”; organizing the union in the workplaces; and, extending the political mandate in relation to society in general.

- In a “company unionism“, the affiliated workers' rights are stronger than those rights of sectors “excluded” from the work process. The alternative of a national union embraces the interests of many other social sectors, not only the workers. The central point is that of the representativeness of the union, building alliances with other sectors of the society to be a privileged agent in the collective formulation of an alternative project. The fundamental issue is to know which universe the union should represent.
- In the face of the poverty and unemployment underway, the unionism should assume a decisive role in relation to the national State, when valuing the work through professional qualification policies and new rights which allow for the qualification of the work, the creation of new jobs even “at the margin” of the formal economy (“Solidarity Economy”), controlling the training processes at the companies, and challenging the current educational system.
- The unionism needs new strategies for the creation of jobs. The transformation of an exclusion and informal economy into a “solidarity economy” can create a number of rich and qualified jobs such as territory and environment recovery, garbage recycling, services provided to the people, continuing education, etc.

The creation of a cooperative communities for mutual help among the workers is the new frontier for the work. However, none of this will come spontaneously, or from the transactional companies' policies; it will come from the civil society. Therefore, it is necessary to have an impulse from the public policies, from the community and, above all, from the unionism, to become a new form of economy and to have market space.

- Fighting the hegemony of the wild individualism implies building a solidarity culture, therefore, opening up to a group of new subjects until then alien to the union culture. This opening brings up the confrontation with cultures that were not part of the union universe, but which bring new values and horizons. This new solidarity carries new perspectives for the unionism, a new ethics to configure the identity of the 19th century unionism.
- A new political culture has to consider a politicization of the everyday. Culture is praxis, an elementary thing, a production context. The expression “political culture” indicates a daily relationship, the way men discuss and decide their fundamental problems. The culture arises from the needs, feeds on the history and cannot be introduced “top down” by the cultural institutions. It is a vital activity of the mind and of the senses, it is a human capacity.

- The current neo-individualism is a successful attempt to reestablish the conservative cultural hegemony, isolating the principal emancipating values of the culture, that is, dispoliticization.

However, the unionism acts as if culture and politics were two separate spheres. They are not aware of its CULTURAL MANDATE. In the capital counteroffensive, the development of the microelectronics holds an extension of the industry of the consciousness, whose ultimate consequences we cannot still foresee totally, especially, concerning the changes in mentality and opinion. It favors the desegregation and fragmentation of the human consciousness and behavior. It does not seek to make its interests and needs more organized at political level, as a means of public and collective expression.

In this perspective, the unionism cannot follow the line of a traditional cultural policy. The unions of the future will have a strategic challenge: to develop a cultural sensibility that will have decisive role at the existential and political level.

Unionism and Citizenless Cities

(work and city administration)

Historically, the citizenship in the workplaces tends to the integration with the public space of the citizenship. For instance, in its earlier fights, the workers on strike left the factories and went to the city squares (the word “strike” comes from the name of a square where the workers met to make collective decisions).

What is born in the ground of the factories is completed at the public squares. In the ABCD, in the 1980s, the workers left the factories and went to the Paço Municipal (a square) where they sought to write, with the own bodies, the word democracy. The result expresses the situation of the democracy in Brazil: the word was not completed due to repression, DEMOC.....

In this perspective, the citizenship in the world of the work (in the workplaces), goes through the OLTs, instruments through which the workers can develop the resistance, the control and the administration of the work organization. We call this process production self-management. At level of the cities, the citizens exercise the democracy directly through instruments such as the participative city budget, the city forums, etc. We call this social self-management. Therefore, the local power is expressed at level of the workplaces articulated with the city-rural public space. This is the essence of the so-called “citizen union”, or “social union.”

The solidarity economy

With the process of exclusion and of structural unemployment, we have to rethink the issue of work, for if there are no jobs, there is a lot of work when we think of the needs of the society.

In Milton Santos's analytic perspective, in the cities of the underdeveloped countries, the specific mode of space organization articulates the most varied forms of capital, work and technology. This organization of the urban space is characterized by the "divided space" in two circuits of the urban economy: a "higher circuit" that has its origin directly in the technological modernization where the monopolies operate. A "lower circuit" that is formed by minor activities and has its roots in the poor population. The relationship between both is dialectic, that is, the lower circuit, being product of the logic of the higher circuit and, at the same time, a hindrance to its expansion.

In these cities, resistance zones proliferate in the form of activities aimed to assist the concrete and immediate needs of survival: small companies, which serve a production, distribution and consumption circuit that works far from the universe of the rationalized and computerized economy.

Therefore, there is, on one hand, a globalized economy, produced from the top, and a sector produced from the bottom, that, in the poor countries, is a popular sector and, in the rich countries, includes the unprivileged sectors of the society, including the immigrants.

Thus, the formation of a new field in the economy becomes possible: the "solidarity economy", through companies run by its own workers, and through production/consumption cooperatives. In the field of the economy of waged work and dependent, the workers, through CUT, are organized in the workplaces; in the field of the solidarity economy, in the self-management companies and cooperatives, the workers can try new forms of associated work.

Finally, in the cities, through the local power, the citizens develop their forms of direct democracy (participative budget, several forums for popular participation). This is already a process underway in the country: the *cutista* organization in the *olts*, the self-management companies, the popular power. As to the local power, the example of Porto Alegre is illustrative: the participative budget, from 16 popular councils, is the public space of decision-making, through plenary sessions that, in the two administrations, have already mobilized about 2 hundred thousand people, articulating more than a thousand entities; each year, these entities mobilize about 20 thousand people. Another important element is the project "Constituent City", that has already organized 2 "constituent congresses" to strategically plan

the city, with the participation of the counselors of the participative budget and many other organizations. They are several forms of construction in the several spaces of the society of an alternative hegemony to the neo-liberalism.

The whole of these organisms will constitute the democratic public and popular space, or the so-called non-state, local, regional, national and worldwide public sphere.