

**EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION
INTRODUCTION DE LA RÉDACTRICE**

Resistance

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The articles in this issue of *Labour, Capital and Society* examine some of the new forms of resistance by groups from below – labour, peasants and others – who are tackling the deep changes brought about by neoliberal globalization. The objective is to draw attention to the many new forms of struggle undertaken by ‘ordinary poor people’ at local levels who only attract the attention of researchers or funding agencies when they turn to violence and threaten the *status quo*, thus reducing resistance to rebellion and violence against the *status quo* (Cheru, 1997). In this period of increased intolerance, in which dissent and resistance are increasingly linked to terrorism, there is a need to conceptualize the nature of current resistance more broadly and the role of the labour movement within it.

A broader conceptualization of resistance would recognize that actions were taken by a wider set of actors, using varying actions, but having in common that they are all aimed at altering social inequalities embedded in unequal power relations. It can be the product of individual actions such as work slowdown or work to rule; absenteeism, alcoholism and many more, including Scott's (1985) everyday forms of resistance. But the most recognized form of resistance is that undertaken collectively – either through a trade union, a social movement, civil society or political parties – as these actions can go beyond the individual to bring about structural change. A better understanding of the way resistance is undertaken and its impact can make a significant contribution towards a better understanding of the process of social change as it provides the dynamic element within the dialectical process.

Labour resistance plays a significant structural role

because of labour's direct role in opposition to the accumulation of capital. While capital acts to maximize accumulation, labour resistance pushes capital into greater redistribution either through higher wages, improved working conditions, or through the state via taxation. Labour does this in a 'framework of resistance', engaging in resistance at different levels simultaneously as they address both economic and political issues (Dansereau, 1994). At the shopfloor, workers' struggle against employers' attempts to keep wages low, skills unrecognized and workers disorganized in order to both accumulate wealth and control the workplace. Shopfloor struggle is strengthened by the union's intervention at the political level – engaging with the state to legislate favourable labour laws that will result in greater rights at the shopfloor including the right of free association, limited hours of work, health and safety regulations and the right to strike, reinforced through anti-scab laws, all of which impact on wages and working conditions. In addition, labour also engages in resistance over broader social and political issues that address the very nature of the state, thus “contributing to the creation of welfare states, welfare mechanisms and safety nets ... (and in) reshaping the public social agenda” (Henk 1999:2). This broader political role has resulted in a variety of different forms of alliances with social groups, states and ruling parties that range from very loose to very formal, even at times engaging in partisan politics (Dansereau, 1994).

This 'framework of resistance' is therefore made up of a complex set of strategies that involve shopfloor and political actions that involve alliances with other social actors, and vary according to specific conjunctures. One of the central elements impacting the capacity to resist is the nature of the political space in which it is operating. It is well known for example that during periods of colonialism, apartheid or dictatorships, the lack of political space severely constrained labour's capacity to organize (see for example Buhlungu, 2001). By contrast, the greater political space during the post World War II period in industrialized coun-

tries saw higher levels of union organization and the emergence of a 'social pact' between capital and labour over a redistribution of wealth that translated productivity increases into wage increases, and led to the emergence of the welfare state and enhanced social programmes. This became known as the Fordist compromise as greater wealth redistribution was in turn translated into greater demand, economic growth and ongoing capital accumulation.

The articles in this issue address some of these current issues. *Ross* situates current debates around the nature of resistance within the search for new forms of democratic practice needed to construct a radical egalitarianism in response to the increasingly atrophied democratic form adopted by states transformed by neoliberalism. *Ross* demonstrates the limit to the argument that resistance should be limited to forms of participation and the state abandoned as the site of struggle.

Closely linked to participation is the notion of partnership, a prevalent model of corporate governance that encourages companies to engage in partnerships with workers and community groups rather than confrontation. *Miller* examines the limits of this approach when used by multinational companies who face resistance when they penetrate new regions.

A prominent component of this debate is the idea that unions become radical only when they form alliances with other social groups from below, thereby engaging in social movement unionism. The argument is that these alliances engage them in struggles beyond their immediate shopfloor concerns. Yet, when we see the framework of resistance within which labour operates, we recognize that labour alliances are ever present and benefit both groups involved and workers at the shopfloor. The source of radicalism comes instead from the specific conjuncture in which labour resists, and the nature of the alliances in which it is engaged.

The remaining articles in this issue look at some of the new networks and alliances in which the labour move-

ment is engaged in the current struggle against neoliberal globalization. *Brittain* and *Sacouman* discuss emerging alliances between labour and rural groups in Colombia and the resistance potential of the peasantry and rural proletariat. *Soussi* and *Bellemare*, in addition to discussing the actions of African trade unions during the struggle for independence, as part of their assessment of trade unions in Africa, demonstrate new alliances between different forms of labour organization – between those working in the formal sector and the informal sector.

Given the crucial nature of the labour movement's role in resistance, and the changing nature of struggle in the face of neoliberal globalization, we hope this brief discussion will help generate a renewed debate and ongoing contributions on different aspects of this topic.

Bibliography

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