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RESISTING COMMODIFICATION AND INEQUALITY: TRADITIONAL AND EMERGING FORMS OF MOBILISATION



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OVERVIEW

- capitalist wage labour, 'Rhineland capitalism' and the precarious advance of decommodification
- post-decommodification ? neoliberalism, financialisation and globalisation
- trade unions, precariousness and 'new social movements'
- (how) can solidarity overcome recommodification?



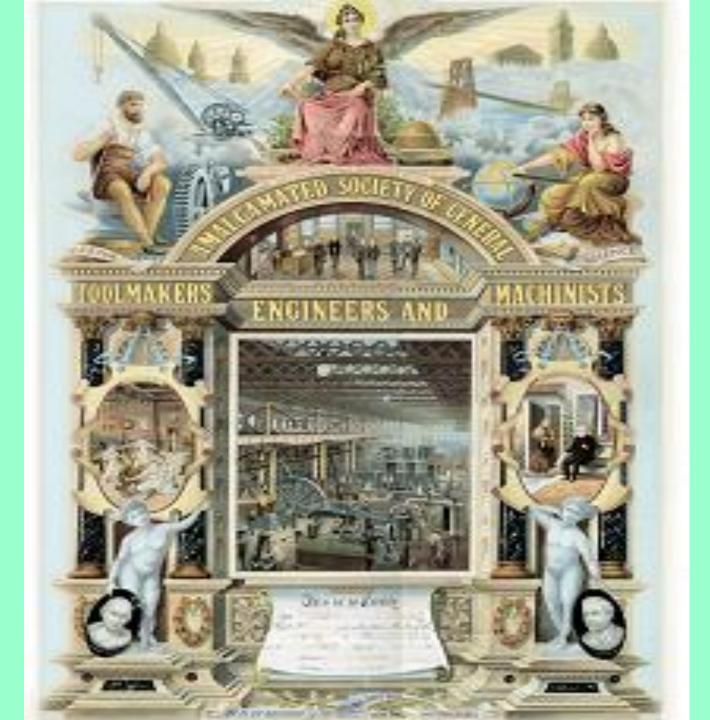


THE HISTORY OF CAPITALIST WAGE LABOUR: FICTITIOUS COMMODITIES AND REAL COMMODIFICATION

- labour power as a commodity: freedom, equality, property and Bentham...
- Polanyi: the violence of commodification...
- ... and counter-movements

'RHINELAND CAPITALISM' AND ORGANISED INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

- 'stakeholder capitalism': constraints on regulation by market
- 'labour is not a commodity': the fight for employment protection legislation
- 'Rhineland capitalism': bias to collective regulation
 - multi-employer bargaining and extension of agreements
- institutionalised workplace 'voice'
- 'social solidarity' and 'social partnership'



THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF SOCIAL RIGHTS?

- where did decommodification come from?
 - > intelligent design or *bricolage*?
 - > social consensus or class struggle?
- contingent historical balance of forces: negotiated accommodation, and/or concession to dampen protest
- institutionalisation of employment protections was a major achievement
 - > but never sufficient, always precarious
 - > its meaning is constantly reconstructed and renegotiated
 - > it is easier to erode practical effect than to abolish formal existence

NEOLIBERALISM, FINANCIALISATION AND GLOBALISATION: POST-DECOMMODIFICATION?

- financialisation and 'deregulation': towards recommodification
- privatisation and hostile take-overs
- the 'platform economy': the return of 'spot contracting' in the labour market
- increasing inequalities of income. wealth and power
- global value chains and 'modern slavery'
- the erosion of workers' collective strength

TRADE UNIONS: THE EROSION OF 'OLD' POWER RESOURCES

- decline in structural and associational power
- institutional power is superficially robust but precarious
- hence unions need new power resources ⇒ search for alliances, coalitions – and new forms of discourse
 - >very different logics of action
 - >can they be integrated?



TRADE UNIONS AND PRECARIOUS WORKERS

- the 'curse of institutional security': are trade unions insiders or outsiders?
- 'crisis corporatism': defending the 'core constituency'?
- unions are almost universally weak among young and precarious labour market groups, worst affected by crisis
- yet in many countries, they have made important efforts to engage with the most vulnerable
- but often met with understandable suspicion



'NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS': MORE EFFECTIVE PROTESTS?

- the 'movements of the squares'
 - > spontaneity, social media and 'orchestration'
 - transnational emulation
- youth protests against unemployment and precarious work (San Precario...)
- more general opposition to austerity and insecurity
 - but problems of aggregating diversity: there is no homogeneous 'precariat'

San Precario

Oh San Precarlo, Protettore di nol,
precari della terra
Dacci oggi la maternità pagata
Proteggi i dipendenti delle catene commerciali, gli
angeli del cali center, le partite iva e
i collaboratori appesi ad un filo
Dona a loro ferie e contributi pensionistici, reddito e

BUILDING SOLIDARITY FROM BELOW?

- resistance or collective bargaining ?
- 'defence of the commons' and the 'solidary economy'
 - > solidarity from the grassroots
 - >politicising the economic
- many social movements address (rhetorical?) trade union agenda
- but (at best) ambivalent relationship with trade unions

THE VARIABLE GEOMETRY OF RESISTANCE

- if unions and social movements cannot act together, they fail separately
- but traditional rivalries between unions and social movements persist
- effective alliances must be based on mutual respect and autonomy
- a shared collective identity requires new understandings and new language
- from despair to hope: is there an alternative?



RE-INVENTING DECOMMODIFICATION?

- beyond Bismarck and Beveridge :
 - > to defend social rights, these must be (re-)invented
 - > what social models fit the needs and aspirations of workers and citizens today ?
- in many countries, right-wing nationalists have captured the initiative
- it is necessary to challenge the dominant paradigm, not just negotiate within it
 - > this requires an alternative, progressive narrative and discourse
- re-inventing decommodification demands strategic imagination – from both scholars and activists!



Thank you for your engagement!

