

# TRADE UNIONISM PATHWAYS IN THE YEARS 2000

**José Dari Krein and Hugo Dias<sup>1</sup>**

## **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is developing a preliminary assessment on Brazilian trade unionism situation between 2003 and 2013<sup>2</sup>, whose performance has led to improvement of labor indicators, but is at a crossroads between advancing and strengthening its corporative agenda and need of (re)building a wider social leadership, by incorporating new demands and approaching to new social mobilization ways. The paper seeks to work based in a debate on union revitalization in international literature, analyzing trade unionism from five dimensions: institutional/organizational, affiliation/ representative, economic, political and social.

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is bring some elements to allow analyzing Brazilian trade unionism experience between 2003 and 2013, from debate present in international literature on union revitalization. Assuming that, although their activities have contributed to improvement of labor indicators, it has been at crossroads between advancing and strengthening corporative and need to (re)build a broader social leadership, adding new demands approaching to new social mobilization ways. In other words, during the period concerned, we may observe persistence of contradictory dynamics, which on one side several indicators point to the strengthening of unions as institutions, while from the other, they lose power within Brazilian society, as main source of information reporting all issues related with labor world and the working class in a broad sense.

The text is structured in two parts. The first one briefly tracks uneven scope of crisis and trade unionism revitalization, and genesis of debates on union revitalization. It is also introduced an overview, taken from collective works coordinated by Frege and Kelly (2004) stating about four dimensions of union revitalization, by them identified (affiliation, institutional, economic and political), to which authors added a fifth dimension, named societal.

The second part encourages approaching into Brazilian specific situa-

---

1.Professors at the UNICAMP Institute of Economics, and researchers at CESIT/IE. They participate in research of the thematic project 2012/20408-1: "Labor Contradictions in current Brazil. Formalization, precariousness, outsourcing and regulation" and in project "Trade unionism on the 21st century: challenges and experiences of union revitalization", together with the Only Workers Central (CUT); The Center of Union Studies and Labor Economics; Center of Social Studies at Coimbra University. AFL CIO Center of Solidarity in Brazil; Foundation Friedrich Ebert and Social Observatory Institute. We thank researchers of both projects for allowing us discussing several elements of present paper.

2 This paper does not analyze most recent union actions and strategies, when they assume a new dimension to carry on mobilizations and articulations with other social movements in defense of democracy and social rights.

tion. Based in mentioned analysis model – allowing boosting comparative trade unionism development among countries – it was unfolded the notion that, in spite of having seen progresses regarding a variety of revitalization sizes, there are still signs of a project crisis as far as Brazilian trade unionism has lost its wider social protagonism in analyzed period. Therefore, it is on institutional and societal dimensions, where fall doubts and uncertainties on its possible revitalization.

## The uneven scope of crisis and union revitalization

The word “crisis” is largely used in approach to great social transformations. If we consider this notion as “upset to balance among different components” (DUBAR, 2006: 14), main transformations occurred within economic, political and productive sphere in last decades, modified specific historical relationship between capitalism, state and democracy which prevailed in advanced capitalist countries after WWII. The purpose of releasing market from all ties, be it on a national or global scale, altered a previous (precarious) balance, putting external pressure on one of its components: trade unionism as social movement, political actor and characteristic institution of industrial and capitalist society.

In general, economic and political order built from crisis of 1970 led to significant changes in organization working power bases (DIAS and FERNANDES, 2016: 39-43), creating an unfavorable situation for collective actions in a context of neoliberal hegemony and a new productive geography and working class morphology (ANTUNES, 1995; DIAS, KREIN and COLOMBI, 2015). A substantial part of literature on trade unionism took a fatalistic and finalist prediction, associating transition to “post-industrial” and “post-Fordist” societies to “historic trade unionism decline” (RODRIGUES, 2002; BOITO JR., 2003; BOITO JR. and MARCELINO, 2010). Nevertheless, a crisis is inherently an open process, whose final outcome will not necessarily be fatal for the affected subject.

Liberal market economies trade unions y (HALL and SOSKICE, 2001) in advanced capitalist countries, are the first to suffer impact of neoliberal turning point, and consequently it is in these countries where will initially develop debates on union revitalization. The example of United States is, from that point of view, paradigmatic. From years 1980, in a context of attack by capital and globalization, trade unions faced a triple threat: economic restructuration, increasing employer’s hostility and the Reagan administration. Traditional trade unionism tactics proved to be fragile against increasing business opposition, and in the short term this did not imply in a radical strategy change. In 1989 was created the “Organizing Institute”, but however it is from 1995, when John Sweeney was elected president of AFL-CIO, that experience alternatives were launched to trade unionism traditional practice of services, designated as *organizing* (HURD, 1998; VOSS and SHERMAN, 2000). This search of alternatives will

also expand gradually to coordinated market economies countries (HALL and SOSKICE, 2001), where consequences of these transformations also started to be felt.

Debates on renovation and union revitalization are held within this context, characterized by a plurality of visions and theoretical orientations, suggesting a new action strategy expanding trade unionism beyond its traditional field of action, meaning relations of production on a national scale. The orientation to extend field of intervention (WEVER, 1998) emphasizes trade unions need of organizing workers excluded from traditional industrial relations forums, promoting alliances with other organizations, in an attempt to organize and represent new members and new interests exceeding traditional collective bargaining issues.

The notion of social movement unionism became a reference within this debate. Authors like Peter Waterman interpret unionism crisis as a crisis of a particular type of trade unionism, namely the industrial/national, characteristic of Fordist wage relationship, which showed difficulties in responding to speeding up globalization economic processes. Waterman and other academics tried in some way to find answers through an attempt to understand emergence of militant union movements, in different world economy regions, more precisely in countries like South Africa and Brazil from years 1970, or Philippines and South Korea in the 80's (LAMBERT and WEBSTER, 1988; SCIPES, 1992; WATERMAN, 1993; SEIDMAN, 1994).

In fact, what was at issue was learning how to act in much more unstructured workforce contexts. Northern countries trade unions, having been benefited from Fordist wage relationship, after WWII, began facing difficulties to represent and organize an increasingly fragmented working class, heterogeneous and precarized, structural and structuring variable Global southern countries working classes. Therefore, southern experience will be inspiring to union action revitalization in northern countries. Some authors, still during decade of 1990, will try to identify features of this profile in different trade unions, such as Canadian Auto Workers Union or in the campaign Justice for Janitors, in United States. (MOODY, 1997).

An important element to consider is that trade unions with specific ideologies and identities are inserted in national labor relationships systems, with singular historical pathways. Although these institutional agreements are not permanent in its own essence, they do have a social and historical incrustation (EBBINGHAUS and VISSER, 2000) firmly influencing trade unionism, since are part of different structures of opportunities, and consequently from different trade union's directories. The interaction between State and employers, industrial relations institutions, union identities strategies in each national context, and struggles on certain national practices, acts as mediating instances for globalizing "external" pressures. Thus, if unions have to face different types of problems, new different challenges arise, as well as diversified sources of revitalization (HYMAN, 2001; HYMAN et al., 2015; DIAS, KREIN and COLOMBI, 2015).

The research coordinated by Carola Frege and John Kelly (2004) shows an insurmountable analysis for a comparative study of union revitalization experiences. On one side it identifies dimensions of the revitalization, a task that trade unions deal with by initiating strategic shift processes; on the other, six types of strategies used to achieve these objectives: organization and recruiting new members (organizing), partnership trade unions-employers, political actions, and changes in trade union structures, coalition-building and international solidarity. The relationship between dimensions and strategies is not completely linear, since one strategy may try to deal with many revitalization dimensions (FREGE and KELLY, 2004a: 33).

The four union revitalization dimensions, defined by Behrens, Hamann and Hurd (2004) will be reference to analyze current Brazilian trade unionism situation - institutional, affiliation, economic and political. The "institutional" dimension is basic, in which considers its organizational and governance structures, its internal functioning and its capacity to adapt to new contexts and develop new strategies; the dimension affiliation is related to strengthening of legitimacy, representativeness bargaining power through increasing absolute number of associates, unionization rate and diversification of its internal composition, keeping track of workforce modifications; the economic dimension is based in capacity to obtain salary increment and other benefits, and its more general impact in distribution of wealth; and political dimension of interacting with actors in different levels of government and in three areas of activities (electoral, preparation of legislation and its implementation) in a way to increase efficiency and influence in public policies process of elaboration, through participation in social pacts bargaining, or collective mobilizations, through political strikes.

**Table 1 – Dimensions of union revitalization**

Dimension	Description	Indicators	Relevance
Affiliation	Strengthening of legitimacy, representativeness and negocial power	absolute number of members	Increase in union resources (material and human)
		Union density	Increase in union power , in companies or in the sector
		Internal composition	Keep track of changes in the workforce, trying to represent its increasing diversity (women, immigrants, part-time, temporary workers)
		attitudes and expectations of existing members	Encourage members in order to make changes having better chances of success
Economic	Obtaining salary and benefits improvement and a more general impact in wealth distribution	Development of new techniques, out from collective bargaining	Increase economic leverage.
		Modify inefficient bargaining structures	
		Redefinition of role of unions in the negocial process	
Political	Interaction with actors in different levels of government and in three areas of activities.	Electoral	Grant victory of candidates and/or allied parties
		legislation	Increase efficiency and influence in the process of elaborating public policies through participation in social pacts bargaining or through collective mobilization by political strikes
		Implementation	Contribute to the fulfillment of relevant legislation through enforcement, pressure and recourses to the courts
Institutional	Changes in organization and	organizational structures and governance	Capacity to adjust to new contexts and develop new strategies of revitalization
		Internal functioning	
Societal	General modalities of relationship with the society	Ideological	Challenge ideological hegemony and influence debate of ideas
		Trust	Improve public image in general and in its target audience
		Alliance/Colligation	Mutual reinforcement of common causes, access to new audiences

Source: Behrens, Hamann and Hurd (2004) made by the authors and after discussions with research groups mentioned in reference note # 1.

We will add a fifth dimension, naming it societal. It includes modalities of relationship which in general, unions establish with society, and they embody three elements: ideological, trust in union institutions and building of social alliances. Regarding the ideological element, it is seen by union organizations as a struggle intending to challenge “the hegemony of ideas and neoliberal values, with alternative visions about reaching social justice and more democracy” (FREGE and KELLY, 2004b: 194).

The element trust in union institutions is related to the image public opinion has, in general, about these organizations, and expressing not only attitudes of greater or lesser degree of trust in the institution, as well as practices of higher or smaller degree of closeness regarding it. And last, the element building of alliances is related to the analysis of type of links unions established

with other sectors of civil society, be them social movements social, backers of materialistic or post-materialistic causes, or other organizations, such NGO's dealing with poverty issues, inequalities and work.

## Brazilian contradictory case trends

The (new) Brazilian trade unionism, as previously mentioned, is considered, by some authors, a reference for discussions regarding union revitalization. In fact, in years 1980 there was a high increase in Brazilian trade unionism, an opposite trend of what was happening in main countries. However, studies show that from 1990's, there was a slowdown in collective action capacity, with a deterioration of union indicators, in a context of deconstruction of labor market and inclusion of the country in globalization, plus adoption of policies anchored in the Washington Consensus and flexibilization of working relationships. Trade unionism persists, showing capacity of action, but loses density and force in the society.

### Institutional and organizational dimension

Legal framework regulation and union's institutions are characterized by an ambiguity. On one side, union organization is framed by regulations detailed and supervised by the State, defining professional categories and economics, preventing competition (principle of unity), creating a hierarchical and confederative system, requiring State recognition so to allow the entity exercising their union privileges. But on the other side, these regulations recognize and establish conditions allowing union entities to structure them. So far as, that in spite of criticism regarding limitation brought by State control, option of almost all political and unionist currents was using official structure to, through it, develop workers struggles.

This structure seems very flexible, capable of adapting to different historical contexts (CARDOSO, 2003), serving to union movement become, for example, an important political agent in historical moments – as it happened in Brazilian re-democratization process, and to repress, put an end and control trade unions, in unfavorable political times for workers. It is to say, same regulation can be used both to grant a series of safeguards to collective actions, and allowing existence of entities without representativeness, surviving with compulsory charges and union singleness.

In recent years, two new trends have been consolidated. Differently from experience in advanced countries, union fragmentation worsened with creation of new entities in all levels. There was a growth in number of trade union federations (currently there are 12, being 6 officially recognized<sup>3</sup>), second-degree structures and number of unions, going from 10,000 to 16,000, being 11,000

<sup>3</sup> Union recognized centrals are: CUT, Força Sindical, UGT, CTB, NCST, CSB. Non-recognized centrals are: CSP/CONLUTAS, Central do Brasil Democrática dos Trabalhadores (CBDT), Central Unificada dos Profissionais Servidores Públicos do Brasil, União Geral dos Trabalhadores, Intersindical/Central da Classe Trabalhadora. Intersindical/Instrumento de Luta da Classe trabalhadora. Cf. <http://www3.mte.gov.br/sistemas/cnes/relatorios/painel/GraficoFiliadosCS.asp>.



of workers, between 1991 and 2001<sup>4</sup>. The Ministry of Labor trade union update register, although does not allow identifying evolution of number of unions, shows there are 14,185 unions affiliated to trade union federations, including entities for which registration has been filed and invalid updates. Besides, there are at least 2,785 non-affiliated unions, and 5,067 employers. So, even though it is not possible comparing both information sources in a way to track evolution of number of entities, fragmentation is obvious, and total of entities exceed 22,000 in the country<sup>5</sup>. The explanation for this lies in several factors: in ambiguity of trade union structure, in a legislation recognizing central unions, in the understanding by the Judiciary of prevalence of most specific entity, and in reconfiguration of labor market.

The second trend was burial of union reform. The National Labor Forum, acting between 2003 and 2005 with a tripartite composition, was not able to introduce a union organization alternative proposal. As reform did not advance, two measures adopted by Government – recognizing union centrals and its parallel structures, and allocation of compulsory union contribution to second degree union entities - parallel federations and confederations – and civil servants – legitimated official structure and withdrew trade union reform discussions from political national agenda. The measures were supported by recognized union centrals.

The first consequence of these measures was many union entities remaining without representativeness, as can be seen by occurrence - after 2011, of many strikes and workers demonstrations without coordination, and even against union orders. The second consequence was creation of a “union market” where disputes among union centrals to carry union entities with them, got much worst, since each new union created or affiliated meant increase in union taxes. This led to a race to create new entities, because it became harder creating entities through union votes. The third consequence was creation of a schizophrenic union structure, where principle of union unity in the base prevailed, and pluralism of entities of second and third degrees. Another aspect to be highlighted, considering legal framework, was non-advance of initiatives of union’s unification, representation of outsourced and unemployed in the period.

In contrast, it is possible discussing a set of experiences of democratization in union life, where workers are consulted to define union strategies. Nevertheless, they are localized experiences, and they are not the reality of majority of union entities. In the same perspective of internal organization, there are many cases of creation of secretariats or other organizational spaces gathering specific segments of the category, such as women, young people and ethnical/race groups. Also in the international area, we see increasing worker’s participation in forums and general entities and in articulation of union networks by

---

4 IBGE did not do any new union survey after 2001.

5 Cf. <http://www3.mte.gov.br/sistemas/cnes/relatorios/painel/GraficoFiliadosCS.asp>, data from June 4, 2015.

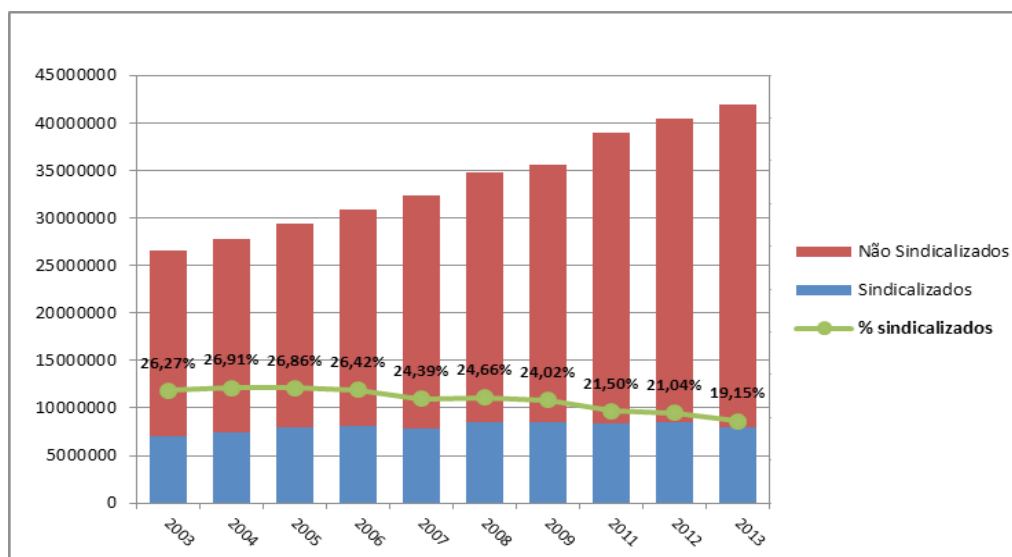
economic sectors and by companies. In the same perspective, it is marked an effort of strengthening of both Americas regional organizations, supported by increasing gestures of international solidarity.

In summary, while there has been a rise of available resources for union proceedings, current structure creates incentives tending to a persistent fragmentation of many union entities, bureaucratic and wiped out, than keeping them strong and representative, having strategic capacity to develop organizational change processes, to adjust to new contexts.

### Affiliation dimensions and union entities representativeness

Regarding affiliation dimensions, although joining trade unions has increased in absolute terms, it did not kept pace with strong job expansion in the period. So, in spite of an increase of around 3 million in number of affiliates, number of employed workers increased in 21 million, between 2001 and 2013, according to National household sample survey (PNAD). The rate of affiliation among total of employed workers remained almost stable. However it decreased among registered workers from 26pct to 19pct. Boosted by election of first President being an affiliated worker, number of affiliates grew 29pct between 2001 and 2005, a higher rate than employed workers, which grew 21pct during the period. After 2005, job's rate grew more intensely, while lost strength in relative terms.

**Figure 1 - Formal jobs\* - Brazil (2003 - 2013)**



Source: National household sample survey (PNAD)/ Elaborated by: Pedro Henrique Alcantara. Not affiliated / Affiliated / Percentage of Affiliated

\* Does not include domestic work and statutory staff.

The affiliation fell in segments and regions with higher union tradition, and grew in Northeast and the North, regions which had higher economic dynamism, as stated by Silver (2005). Its growth was equally high among women



and men and more significant in the countryside, also boosted by rural trade unions role on making feasible farmer's retirement. The stability of trade union density among employed workers and its decrease among formal workers is based in characteristics of generated job, mainly in sectors with low union tradition.

It is also important highlighting two additional aspects: 1) Brazilian legal institutional system does not stimulate affiliation, since workers have access to collective bargaining benefits without the requirement to be members, and unions may obtain other sources of compulsory financing without being associates; 2) union cannot unite outsourced, unemployed and informal workers. In some segments they have collective representative organizations – such as popular trade, alternative means of transport, among others – but apart from rare exceptions, they do not belong to union centrals, which mainly represent formal workers.

### **Economic dimension**

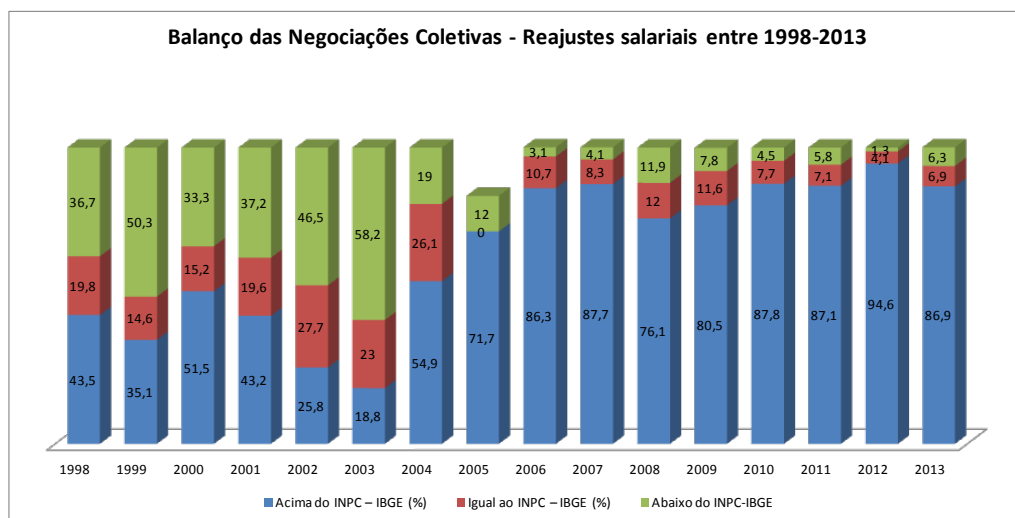
During the reference period, labor market showed a favorable outcome, with decrease of unemployment, increase of formalization, recovery of average salaries and progresses in income distribution (BALTAR and KREIN, 2013). Improvement of these indicators are related to: a context of higher economic growth; minimum wage valorization policy (object of bargaining between trade unionism and government); policies delaying entrance of young people to labor market; salary negotiations result. In the meantime, we can affirm that advances achieved were limited, because labor market is poorly structured, with enormous social inequalities. We must state that these advances, although not determining, were result of union actions.

In a general way, labor relationships flexibilization introduced in years 1990 was not reverted. In some cases it was taken further, like for example, in negotiation of working hours and forms of hiring (outsourcing, for instance). Regarding collective bargaining process, it is going on an increasing decentralization of collective negotiations by a more specific sector, following union fragmentation trend, and by company, strengthening an agenda acting closer to company's needs, particularly regarding working hours flexibility and advances in variable remuneration (KREIN and TEIXEIRA, 2014).

Regarding collective bargaining, progresses on this review are mainly focused on debates in payment for work. As an example, we see a clear change after 2004. From this year on, more than 80pct of salary negotiations got, at least, inflation-adjusted new wages, and in 2012, 95pct of these negotiations got some kind of real increase. (KREIN and TEIXEIRA, 2014). Variable remuneration also grew expressively in worker's annual income, in most organized sectors of the economy, including bargaining of profit and/or results participation program (PLR).<sup>6</sup>

6. There is also some news on issues related with gender social relations and against all forms of discrimination. The developments refer to a set of maternity protection clauses, reaffirming in a certain way social role of women. As for wage inequalities and occupational or professional segregations, we do not see any advances.

## Figure 2 - Collective bargaining balance – Salary adjustments applied between 1998-2013



Source: SACC – Dieese – Collective hiring monitoring panel  
Over National Consumer price index (INPC) /Same as INPC /Below INPC

Labor relationships conflicts intensified after the 2008 crisis. Boito Jr and Marcelino (2010) show there was a resumption of strike’s cycle in recent years, related to an attempt from unions to improve its base rate of remuneration, in a context of increased restrictions in progress of negotiations, due to a slower growth in economic activity and rising inflation. The table down here shows path of strikes, both defensives and offensives. We can see that 2013 was the year with most strikes.

## Table 3 - Total of strikes in Brazil. Private and public sphere, between 2003-2013

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>Total</b>	340	302	299	320	316	411	518	445	554	877	2050
Public service	156	158	137	145	140	155	215	233	296	381	796
Public Companies	20	27	25	20	21	29	38	35	29	29	137
Private sphere	160	114	135	151	149	224	264	176	227	464	1106

Source: DIEESE. Elaborated by Dieese

### Political dimension

President Lula’s victory brought great hope for a significant part of union movement, reverting unfavorable situation of years 90’s. Nevertheless, beginning of Lula’s government, within a context of economic crises, was very conservative, particularly regarding economic policy and an agenda of debates at the Legislative Power. In spite of some emphasis in social area and increasing dialogue with social actors, the agenda of reforms of public sector employees’ social security caused important defections in CUT, the main trade union, whit

departure of some groups, which demanded a more critical position against the government. An important part of union movement faced a paradoxical situation, having to assume a position in defense of the government and workers claims they represented. And this drove to exacerbate divergences. Besides, relationship was characterized by strong presence of union leaders in several levels of government, from its beginning, showing level of compromise established between both. (ARAÚJO and VÉRAS OF OLIVEIRA, 2011).

From 2005 and up to 2010, economic policy inflection – based in developmentalist tests and an improvement in labor market indicators<sup>7</sup> – provided an approach of considerable part of union movement and government, intensifying dialogue. This resulted in adoption of some policies championed by union movement, such as recognizing union centrals<sup>8</sup>, policy of valuation of minimum wage, obstruction of main issues regarding flexibility of rights and bargaining of anti-cyclic measures to face 2008 crisis.

Though, union movement could not make viable main points of its agenda, such as implementation of a development model with income distribution and valuing of work, shortened working hours, introduction of legal mechanisms against dismissal without cause, among others. To develop this agenda, union movement organized seven national journeys and countless events in Brasilia. (LADOSKY et. al., 2014: 75-76) Even if not having expressive mobilization, they contributed to advance in dialogue with government.

Another issue to be highlighted is higher presence of union movement in institutional spaces. According to Araújo and Vêras of Oliveira (2011: 93), they were simultaneously unprecedented and had limited extent: "Union participation in institutional spaces became an important action front throughout the 1990's, as we have seen. Lula's government new approach was to look for it and promote it under the reference "social dialogue". Many of these spaces did not obtain an agreement, such as social security reform in National Labor Forum. But in others it was possible to build understanding, as it was the case of competitiveness forums, the National Contract of References for infrastructure works of Growth Acceleration Program (PAC), and end of welfare factor, among others.

With respect to work regulations, Krein and Biavaschi (2015) evaluate all adopted measures to demonstrate existence of contradictory movements. In general, proximity with government, helped more to veto deep changes demanded by employers, from years 1990's, than to enshrine new rights.

In Dilma's government, context became harder from an economic and political point of view, and dialogue lost momentum and union movement became more divided in joint action strategies, expressed in a division of union leaderships in the election process of 2014 and in debate on outsourcing regulation. Later, when bill of law 4330 (outsourcing) was put in vote by the National Congress and Provisional Measures 664 (pensions and retirement) and 665

---

7 See Krein, J. Manzano, M., 2014.

8 Cf Galvão, 2012 and Araújo e Vêras de Oliveira, 2011.

(unemployment insurance and wage allowance) strongly rejected by workers, union movement got a chance to reconnect with society and establish links with social movement in a perspective to fight against destruction of rights and protection.

In spite of not being object of study in present paper, we state that around this resistance, several expressive national mobilizations were held, recalling actions of end-of-decade of 1980. Something similar also occurred in 2001, when Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government tried to approve a project anticipating prevalence of the negotiated over the legislated. This was first time in the period when unionism could develop a great resistance movement and broadest unity of action, also expressing higher autonomy regarding Government. However, trade unionism is losing its political strength, which may be observed in union lobby's sharp fall at the National Congress<sup>9</sup>, in the composition of main offices of the Republic, and in progressive transfer of positions at the Ministry of Labor and Employment.

The analysis of trade unionism relationship with Workers Party's governments has been object of an extended and polemic debate (GALVÃO, 2014). Present paper outlines relationship of union centrals and government, influenced by society's political disputes. Cardoso (2013) states this leads a percentage of union movement (especially CUT and CTB) becoming part of block that came to power, creating a careful strategy to avoid weakening of the government, however driving it to assume dubious positions in many debates. Another block of union centrals adopted a more pragmatic attitude, criticizing and supporting, based in political context and government approval. And finally, there are centrals with a quite critical speech regarding government, with more leftist and pragmatic positions.

So, if in second period of Lula's government all recognized union centrals were in his base of support, subsequently there was a growing gap among them, and joint actions became very rare in first period of Dilma's government. Although spaces of dialogue and bargaining remained active, margin for manoeuvre to carry out agreements narrowed, developing a context with greatest potential of conflicts, as it may be observed in main union leaderships positions at end of Dilma's government.

### Societal dimension

The union movement – in spite of mobilizations and approximation with other social movements in resistance fight against bill of law 4330 and withdrawal of right measures through austerity policy adopted by Dilma's government – has lost strength in Brazilian society in last years. A first aspect allowing seeing this loss of influence is people's fall of confidence in union trades. According to a survey from IBOPE, confidence grew expressively at the beginning of decade, going from 49pct in 1997 to 62pct in 2005, and then falling to 44pct in 2013.

<sup>9</sup> According to DIAP, in 2014, lobby fell from 83 to 46 union leaders between last and penultimate legislature. It is the smallest lobby since 1988. Cf. <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/politica/noticia/2015-01/com-bancada-sindical-reduzida-no-congresso-trabalhadores-temem-retrocesso>. Acesso 03/06/2015.

Another indicator is mobilizations. Despite growing number of strikes and other union actions, main protest rallies held in the period were not organized by trade unionism. In some cases, such as rallies of 2011 in great PAC construction works, in June 2013, or in several strikes in 2014 (street cleaners in Rio, bus drivers in Porto Alegre). At the same time we must highlight a recent change, where an important part of union movement – including centrals with different political ideas and relationship with government – went together in a defensive struggle against withdrawal of rights and against the austerity economic policy.

Historically, trade unionism has been in search of expanding its agenda to establish a dialogue with society, and an articulation with other social movements to participate in the debate on directions of a national development project. In the internal agenda, many initiatives were carried on to include issues of specific groups and widening citizenship (COLOMBI, 2013), such as gender, race, ecology and consumer's issues. Also access to social welfare public policies, with a bias to prevalence of more specific subjects, in detriment of those of more universal character. (GONÇALVES, KREIN and MADI, 2009).

Building of alliances/colligations with other social and popular organizations, although being part of Brazilian trade unionism historical heritage, not always is achieved in a structured and permanent way. In first place, because sometimes it is not seen as an equal partner relationship, thus creating tensions. They do not make unviable joint actions and spaces to build collective actions, like it happened in Global Social Forum and recent worker's demonstrations against austerity measures. Nevertheless, these articulations are not strategic constructions, but very much to the point, since in its essence, during this period, union movement tended to privilege actions more oriented to the categories. However, most of union movements have put in its agenda more general social issues, in an attempt to develop future projects for the country.

The union movement, in its different nuances, was in charge of disputing society's hegemony. During analyzed period, they managed to block initiatives of scaling up flexibilization, especially in the National Congress, but it was not able to discuss general worker's issues in society, nor assume main role in including guidelines related to their historical claims. Trade unionism was strong enough to strengthen its representation in defense of economic and immediate interests of its base, but kept losing space as an institution able to express more general demands of impoverished sectors of society.

## Final considerations

Transformations in composition of working class, in a financial globalization environment, neatly unfavorable to work and collective actions, established a challenge to reinvent union movement. In this sense, this paper intended to bring some preliminary elements to describe Brazilian experience

in period between 2003 and 2013, when the country lived, opposite to global situation, not only the weakening of union movement, but also actions which affirmed it to its base of representation.

Therefore, this was an experience showing contradictory signals. There is a set of indicators pointing to union renewal signs, such as: increase of strikes, increase in number of affiliates, with decrease in density; improvement in wage negotiations, advance in dialogue with the Government. But we can also see evidence of loss of strength and importance of trade unionism in the society, with an increasing disrepute of union institutions, inability to discuss a development project for the country, boosting income distribution and valuing work and emergence of many social mobilizations, and even labor-related, without union's leading.

In spite of improvement of union's acting conditions, legal and institutional arrangement persisted – legitimated with a formal recognition of union centrals – deepening union fragmentation, in both summit and base. New union centrals were constituted and number of unions grew, as well as disputes for controlling entities intensified. In this context, although in main unions an extension of the agenda occurred, including specific demands of women, young workers, retirees, ethnic and racial groups, LGBT social movements, at the same time, actions of solidarity and classes were growing scarcer, and without strong worker's engagement, strategies for inclusion of unemployed, outsourced and informal workers did not have relevance.

While wage relationship will continue being predominant in capitalist societies, trade unionism will not lose its role and relevance. Indeed, there are no democratic and civilized societies without presence of union movements. We subscribe Munck when he states that "a fundamental thesis is that workers and their movements are, and will become, every each time more fundamental in the new globalizing capitalist order. The capitalism is being rebuilt, and the same is happening with the world of work, and worker's organizations." (Munck, 2002: 51).

Therefore, if capitalism development dynamics is unequal, crisis and renovation of union action will also be. During this analyzed period, in spite of having seen progresses in several dimensions of revitalization, signs of a crisis of project will subsist in the measure than Brazilian trade unionism lost a broader social leadership. The challenge of union revitalization will particularly depend on its strategic action capacity, trying to deal with new challenges and searching for taking account of new demands. It is then institutional and societal dimensions which are main dilemmas and where unions have better chances of revitalization.



ANTUNES, R. (1995), *Adeus ao trabalho? Ensaio sobre as Metamorfoses and a Centralidade do Mundo do Trabalho*. São Paulo: Cortez.

ARAÚJO, A. M. C. ; VERAS DE OLIVEIRA, R. V. (2011), "El sindicalismo en la era de lula: entre paradojas y nuevas perspectivas". *Trabajo*. México, v.5, n.2. 83-112.

BALTAR, P.; KREIN, J. D. (2013), "A retomada do desenvolvimento e a regulamentação do Mercado do trabalho no Brasil". *Caderno CRH*, v. 26, n.68, Salvador, BA: maio/ago 2013.

BEHRENS, M.; HAMANN, K.; HURD, R. (2004), "Conceptualizing labor union revitalization". In C. Frege and J. Kelly (eds.), *Varieties of Unionism – strategies for union revitalization in a globalizing economy*, Oxford: Oxford University. 11-29.

BOITO Jr., A.; MARCELINO, P. (2010), "O sindicalismo deixou a crise para trás? um novo ciclo de greves na década de 2000". *Caderno CRH*, Salvador, v.23, nº 59, Maio/Ago 2010, 323-338.

CARDOSO, A. M. (2003), *A década neoliberal e a crise dos sindicatos no Brasil*, São Paulo: Boitempo.

CARDOSO, A. M. (2013), "Para onde foram os sindicatos?". In J. D. Krein et al. (orgs.) *Regulamentação do trabalho e instituições públicas*. São Paulo: Fundação Perseu Abramo, 123-137.

COLOMBI, A.P. (2013), *Entre a fragmentação e a ação unificada: uma análise da atuação do Sindicato dos Bancários e Financieiros de São Paulo, Osasco and Região durante os anos 2000*, Dissertation de Mestrado - Instituto de Economia. UNICAMP.

DIAS, H.; KREIN, J. D.; COLOMBI, A. P. (2015), "As centrais sindicais e a dinâmica do emprego". *Estudos Avançados USP*, 12/2015, 121-136.

DIAS, H.; FERNANDES, L. (2016), *A greve geral de novembro de 2012 e os protestos anti-austeridade – análise a partir do caso português*, *International Journal on Working Conditions*, No.11, June 2016, 37-54.

DUBAR, C. (2006), *A Crise das Identidades – a interpretação de uma Mutação*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento.

EBBINGHAUS, B.; VISSER, J. (2000), *Trade Unions in Western Europe since 1945*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

FREGE, C.; KELLY, J. (2004) (eds.), *Varieties of Unionism – strategies for union revitalization in a globalizing economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

FREGE, C.; KELLY, J. (2004a), "Union Strategies in Comparative Context", In C. Frege and J. Kelly, (eds.), *Varieties of Unionism - strategies for union revitalization in a globalizing economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 31-44.

FREGE, C.; KELLY, J. (2004b), "Conclusions: varieties of unionism", In C. Frege and J. Kelly (eds.), *Varieties of Unionism - strategies for union revitalization in*

a globalizing economy. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 181-195.

GALVÃO, A. (2012), "A reconfiguração do movimento sindical nos governos Lula", In A. Boito Jr.; A. Galvão (orgs.) *Política e classes sociais no Brasil dos anos 2000*. São Paulo: Alameda Editorial, 187-222.

GALVÃO, A. (2014), "A contribuição do debate sobre a revitalização sindical para a análise do sindicalismo brasileiro". *Crítica Marxista*, 38, 103-117.

GONÇALVES, J. R. B.; KREIN, J. D.; MADI, M. A. C. (2009), "Bancos, bancários e representação sindical no Brasil contemporâneo", In XI Encontro Nacional da ABET, Campinas.

HALL, P. A.; SOSKICE, D. (2001) (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism: the institutional foundations of comparative advantage*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HURD, R.W. (1998), "Contesting the dinosaur image: the labor movement's search for a future". *Labor Studies Journal* (Winter 1998), 5-30.

HYMAN, R. (2001), *Understanding European Trade Unionism – between market, class and society*, London: Sage.

HYMAN, R.; GUMBRELL-McCORMICK, R.; BERNACIAK, M. (2015), *El sindicalismo europeo: de la crisis a la renovación?* Colección Cuadernos, núm 40. Madrid: Fundación 1º de Mayo.

KREIN, J. D.; TEIXEIRA, M. (2014), "As controvérsias das negociações coletivas nos anos 2000 no Brasil", In R. Vêras de Oliveira et al. (Orgs.) *O sindicalismo na era Lula: paradoxos, perspectivas e olhares*, Belo Horizonte, MG: Fino Traço. 213-245.

KREIN, J. D.; MANZANO, M. (2014), *Notas sobre a formalização. Estudo de Caso: Brasil*. FORLAC, Escritório Regional da OIT para a América Latina and o Caribe.

KREIN, J. D.; BIAVASCHI, M. B. (2015), "Os movimentos contraditórios da regulamentação do trabalho no Brasil dos anos 2000". *Revista Cuadernos del Cendes*. Caracas (no prelo).

LADOSKY, M. H.; RAMALHO, J. R.; RODRIGUES, I. J. (2014), "A questão trabalhista and os desafios da ação sindical nos anos 2000", In R. Vêras de Oliveira; M. A. Bridi; M. Ferraz (Orgs.), *O sindicalismo na era Lula: paradoxos, perspectivas and olhares*. Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço. 61-85.

LAMBERT, R.; WEBSTER, AND. (1988), "The re-emergence of political unionism in contemporary South Africa", In W. Cobbet and R. Cohen (eds.), *Popular Struggles in South Africa*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 20-41.

MOODY, K. (1997), *Workers in a lean world – unions in the international economy*, London: Verso.

MUNCK, R. (2002), *Globalisation and Labour – the new "great transformation"*. London: Zed Books.

SCIPES, K. (1992), "Understanding the New Labor Movements in the 'Third World': The Emergence of Social Movement Unionism". *Critical Sociology*, 19(2), 81-101.

SEIDMAN, G. (1994), *Manufacturing Militance: Workers' Movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

VOSS, K.; SHERMAN, R. (2000), "Breaking the iron law of oligarchy: union revitalization in the american labor movement". *American Journal of Sociology*, 106 (2), 303-349.

WATERMAN, P. (1993), "Social Movement Unionism: a new model for a new world order". *Review*, 16(3), 245-278.

WEVER, K. S. (1998), "International Labor revitalization: enlarging the playing field". *Industrial Relations*, 37(3), July 1998, pp. 388-407.