

INTRODUCTION

It is with immense satisfaction that DIEESE, through its School of Labor Sciences, presents the first issue of the *Labor Sciences Journal*.

Founded in 1955, DIEESE – the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies– has developed research, consulting and education with the objective of understanding the lived reality of workers, offering them access to trustworthy information that supports them in actions related to changing this reality. For the Brazilian trade union movement, the necessity of knowledge from a class perspective resulted in growing interest in the formation of a *university of workers*. DIEESE participated in this process, founding the School of Labor Sciences and creating an interdisciplinary undergraduate bachelor's course in Labor Sciences, a post-secondary course based on interdisciplinary studies aimed at the production of knowledge by the working class on labor questions. The *Labor Sciences Journal* is a result of DIEESE's efforts to encourage debates on the world of work and stimulate reflection by workers, union leaders and intellectuals. This bilingual journal (Portuguese and English) aims to divulge, as much in the national context as well as the international, articles, research and debates on labor studies, publishing articles, essays, interviews and reviews.

Published twice a year, the journal proposes to be a space for the promotion, formulation and debate of questions related to the world of labor. It does not restrict itself to the demands of the academic world and its traditional rites, yet incorporates intellectual elaborations of an essayist, inquisitory character that relate to research conducted by DIEESE and the debates organized in the School of Labor Sciences. In this respect, the journal aims to be flexible enough to guarantee ample circulation and debate in order to contribute to the wider development of labor sciences.

The inaugural issue of the journal is organized around the theme: why labour sciences? We hope that this dossier recuperates the history of DIEESE, its importance for the production of research with a working-class character and how this led to the founding of a school of workers. Thus, the central theme of labor sciences opens an interdisciplinary space of research and debate on the world of labor, contemporary transformations and the relevance of workers' participation in the production of knowledge for change.

At a moment when Brazilian society is opening itself, in the contraflow of developments in the international context, the opportunity to design and implement a new strategy for national development rooted in the just distribution of wealth has arisen. The value of labor should be a principal pillar of this new development strategy. And this is exactly why this journal represents an important catalyst of hope through its production of knowledge about and through labor, serving as an instrument to foment support for these necessary transformations.

National Direction, DIEESE

THE DIEESE SCHOOL OF LABOR SCIENCES

The Project for a School of Labor Sciences

DIEESE - the Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies, created 58 years ago, “is a unitary organ of the Brazilian union movement destined to study, research, organize educational activities, produce and publicize knowledge and information about labor, in a multidisciplinary context and through the instrument of the scientific method of analysis, in the interests of the working class.”¹

In choosing the name “Department” for its technical organ, the founding unions of DIEESE intended that it become the first department of a Workers’ University formed by the Brazilian union movement. From the outset, this strategic theme in the scientific production of DIEESE was central to its research areas and publications. It served as a protagonist in the union movement through its focus on working-class intellectual formation as well as in the content of the consulting that it offered to unions.

Thus, DIEESE always linked its production of scientific knowledge to informal educational activities for union activists. Education, as a central area of action in DIEESE, involves the formation of adults through the production and appropriation of knowledge that responds to the interests of the working class. Such knowledge, which arises through educational activities, is produced by and for the working class, aiming to

¹Statute of DIEESE, Chapter II art. 3°

transform their concrete realities.

To commemorate its 50th anniversary in 2005, DIEESE and the union movement began debating the possibility of opening a post-secondary school for workers with an undergraduate degree in labor sciences. It was considered an opportune moment to revive a dream present since the creation of DIEESE in the 1950s. Throughout 2006, with the objective of reflecting on the viability of such an endeavor, DIEESE studied national and international experiences of post-secondary education for workers, organized debates among its directors and technical staff and consulted with its member organizations to sound out what the union movement thought of the project for a workers' university.²

Many contributions were received, revealing as much the diversity of visions of the Brazilian working class as the necessity for the critical production of knowledge for the realization of such a project of political pedagogy. A large number of union leaders believed that the school should focus on knowledge of society and the world of labor from a philosophical, social, economic and political perspective based on various areas of study. They hoped for the construction of a school that allowed for the elaboration by workers of their own history and, at the same time, opened its doors to society as a whole. Workers said, through the consultation, that they needed a different school from those that existed, which did not separate thought and action, distinguished by the conception of formation that it practiced and the social project that it sought to construct.

This brief process of consultation of leaders, consultants and workers was followed by various workshops in 2007 and 2008 organized around the conceptual and methodological development of the educational project. With the objective of thinking through and debating this post-secondary education project, more than 100 union members and union educators indicated by the trade union centrals participated in the workshops as well as technicians from DIEESE, academics and researchers from various universities. The construction of the School of Labor Sciences, therefore, was the result of a shared process directed to the priority target population – the union

²287 unions responded to the questionnaire, a representative sample from all regions of the country.

movement – by the directors and staff of DIEESE, academics, universities and specialist consultants.

In the middle of 2009, DIEESE sent an Institutional Development Plan for a School (PDI) to the Ministry of Education (ME), soliciting authorization to open an undergraduate course in labor sciences as a pedagogical experiment. After two technical evaluations by the Evaluation Commissions of the ME, the School of Labor Sciences received its credentials and was approved by the National Council of Education in October 2011. Authorized by the Ministry of Education, the school opened the first bachelor's degree course in labor sciences in Brazil in April 2012 with the first class beginning its studies in August 2012. The educational institution and the course of studies are experimental proposals within the orbit of Article 81 of the federal government's Law of Guidelines and Bases.³

What is the purpose of the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences?

The principal intention of the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences and its first Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree in Labor Sciences is to be a lively space for the reaffirmation of the centrality of labor in society, something largely neglected in a good number of countries who have partially or fully embraced the neoliberal project.

Yet the affirmation of the centrality of labor is not sufficient in itself to fully explain the types of labor we are observing, studying, researching, discussing or constructing. It is here that the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences aims to distinguish itself by proposing to study labor *through* those that live from their work as opposed to education merely *about* workers. It is from the lived experience of workers and their class perspectives that we are interested in producing knowledge about labor, reaffirming its centrality, its values and its visions. The interdisciplinary vision of labor present in the school's pedagogy aims to rescue those lost in the fragmentary and partial perspective that has structured much of labor studies which has led to the construction of erroneous understandings and politics that are ineffectual in confronting contemporary challenges.

³ Article 81 of Law 9394 dated 20/12/121996 includes the following clause: "The organization of institutions and courses with experimental teaching is permitted as long as it obeys the dispositions of this law."

Armed with this perspective, the school's mission to educate critical subjects through scientific and humanistic preparation with the objective of transforming society, producing knowledge about labor as a human activity and diffusing this scientific and cultural research through educational actions oriented to the union movement and society as a whole.

The objectives prioritized in the Pilot Pedagogical Project of the school are:

- Provide an integral human formation that allows graduates to produce knowledge and act purposely in the social reality in which they live and work.
- Create new forms of studying, educating and researching;
- Organize the creation of methodologies for the construction of rigorous indicators to accompany and diagnose the situation of equality in the country and construct proposals for actions for different social actors;
- Publicize the scientific, educational and cultural production of the school to all of society, particularly for social and union movements with less access to academic culture;
- Constitute a center of excellence in labor studies through the activities of the school and its network of scholars by way of academic and non-academic exchanges;

The School of Labor Sciences initiated its activities of research and education through the creation of a three-year Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree in Labor Sciences, organized around the intellectual formation of workers and preparing them to dominate the various "languages" that will allow them to understand the rapidly changing contemporary world and intervene in this reality in which they live and work.

Labor Sciences

Work as a human activity is the object of study proposed by the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences as a pedagogical experiment. The work inherent to human life is at the very heart of what is considered humanity. Labor as well as different social organizations throughout history are the result, and at the same time, the requisite of the human condition irrespective of their forms of life. This human activity *par excellence* through which men and women construct the world and produce life, whether in a

shared manner or through coercion, unites together in the same process the actions of *doing, thinking, interpreting* and *feeling*. Labor *strictu sensu* and the social relations of work are, therefore, the source not only of social wealth, but also of ideas, principles, sentiments, dreams and struggles.

The development of capitalist society created the necessity for scientific knowledge of the distinct dimensions of labor. Throughout the capitalist mode of production, knowledge of labor has been advanced and innovated with its processes investigated in theory and experimented in practice. Labor, as the object of study of various sciences with distinct reference points, has been approached in its different manifestations, but not always through the same concepts. Studies conducted in the sociology of labor, economics, political economy, political sociology, social history, philosophy and education, among other disciplines of knowledge, aim to explain, understand and develop this social practice using their diverse theoretical and methodological references of investigation. The proposal of the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences incorporates the idea that *labor* is not the exclusive object of study of just one area of knowledge. It does not propose a definition of *labor sciences*, but a construction of its understanding through the choices demarcated in the sociology of science and the object of study of that which is considered most adequate for a workers' school. In verifying in this way that *labor*, similar to education, is a social practice, a human activity and an object of study, the DIEESE school proposes that labor – as an object of study that serves workers as a heterogeneous social group – not be treated by *Labor Sciences* in a fragmentary manner.

This conceptual option does not ignore or bypass the theoretical contributions and discoveries that scientists from various areas of knowledge have brought to the study of labor. On the contrary, this scientific production is a permanent interlocutor even when it is produced within specific disciplinary fields of origin. The school considers that the scientific study of labor must be considered under different theoretical and methodological perspectives within the social and human sciences through an approach that interests the critical formation of the worker. Yet this approach to labor sciences that the school proposes begins from studies and research produced in universities and research centers within and beyond the country, who have conceived of and studied

social reality as a totality and have produced interdisciplinary knowledge. Interdisciplinarity in the production of scientific knowledge has become more common in the last ten years. Various authors have discussed the question and recognized its importance in the production of knowledge since it takes into account the complexity of social phenomena.

Finally, what distinguishes labor as an object of interdisciplinary study in this school, and justifies its realization as an experiment, is that it treats teaching and research from the point of view *of work and the worker* and not *about work and the worker*. In its undergraduate course, the school considers the worker as a subject and object in the same process of production of knowledge and proposes a methodological development for this possibility, beginning from the scientific practices of diverse areas of knowledge. Therefore, labor sciences in this school is specifically concerned with the possibility of producing studies and knowledge of the worker as the social object that he/she is; at the same time, the worker is both subject and object of knowledge. This is the meaning of education intended by the school through this experimental pedagogical project: provide to workers and union leaders an education in labor studies in its different aspects that interests these social groups, allowing for appropriate theoretical and methodological development in which the subject is transformed through the process of learning.

The world today, real life, is marked by a speed that is almost impossible to accompany; change is so broad and important that it appears beyond our comprehension. Labor has also experienced profound transformations in this period, prompting some analysts to argue that it is no longer central to life as it was in middle of the last century. In organizing an undergraduate course as explained above, we consider these new times that are lived, perceived and conceived as the subject of labor, taking into account new and old mediations that are established between *the worker and his/her work and the worker and other dimensions of life*.

The interdisciplinary undergraduate course at the school proposed by DIEESE is a response to the demand and the current and historical struggle of the union movement for a permanent post-secondary education. The movement of Brazilian workers for post-secondary education is inserted in the struggles of the working class for knowledge and education for everybody.

How is the DIEESE School of Labor Sciences structured?

The DIEESE school of labor sciences is organized as a separate unit under the auspices of DIEESE with a technical, administrative and financial profile consonant with the values and principles of the larger organization. The School Maintainer Council, responsible for institutional orientation and financial support, is composed of representatives of the union organs that compose the National Union Direction of DIEESE and the member union centrals. In addition to this Council, the school statutes provide for other councils with specific attributions such as Technical-Scientific, Post-Secondary and Courses.

The activities of the school incorporate various dimensions of education carried out by DIEESE. In addition to the undergraduate course (Interdisciplinary Bachelor's Degree in Labor Sciences with a class load of 2400 hours and three years of duration), the school integrates all the activities related to union education such as extension courses of short duration (with a class load of 24 hours and three days of duration) on different themes related to the union movement. Currently there are more than 20 study paths in the thematic axes of collective negotiation, employment, income, planning and public policies.

In addition to short courses, the school also coordinates specialized union education activities such as the Training Program for Union Leaders and Organizers –PCDA. Initiated in 1992, this program has already graduated thousands of union leaders and activists, aiming to debate the role of labor in a new perspective of national development. Its current version involves 300 hours of immersion instruction.

The school also brings together and coordinates the development of education projects formed in partnership with a wide variety of public organs in areas such as professional education and the health of workers.

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