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The future of trade union structures and strategies
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Towards a renewed understanding of the erosion of solidarity

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Content

- Understanding individualisation (#4)
- A changing relation to work (#4)
- Transformation of collective involvement (#3)
- Future routes for trade unions? (#6)

1. Understanding individualisation (#1/4)

■ Individualism / individualisation

- Individualism: multiple understandings (philosophy, sociology...) and value judgments.
- Individualisation: wish to be closer to facts – social process of differentiation.

■ Individualisation is not new

- Socio-cultural mutation at work for centuries, with a speeding up these last decades.
- A characteristic of modernity
 - » End of village communities; industrialisation; arise of large cities; increased mobility, trading and schooling; increased anonymity...

1. Understanding individualisation (#2/4)

■ Some features that can explain why this socio-cultural mutation leads to feel a sense of disquiet

- The loss of collective references
 - » Feeling of uncertainty, loss of identity, looking for normality...
- The gap between real-life and institutions
- The valorisation of subjectivity
 - » Everybody chooses his destiny. Everybody decides what is good or bad for him.
Need of "capitals (Bourdieu)" for this. Social progress has increased these capitals but nowadays they are threatened.

1. Understanding individualisation (#3/4)

- **Positive a priori about traditional collectives**
 - They secure and provide marks
 - They also limit what is possible and create cleavages (in/out of a collective)
- **Individualisation is not a weakness**
 - It is a victory = Access to the status of "individual (self)"
 - Opposite effect of individualisation
 - » Also an individualisation of social risk that leads to exclusion
- **Individualisation is ambivalent**
 - Mix of choices and constraints
 - Mass phenomenon
 - » Individual biographies in a common destiny

1. Understanding individualisation (#4/4)

- **Individualisation cannot be undone**
 - However this is not « the end of history »
 - Individuals always need bonds
 - » Within family, at work, in civic life ... however a strong bond is replaced by multiple bonds
 - » With multiple bonds, even if they are weaker, an individual is not out of the "social world" when a bond is broken.
 - » Plural identity versus single identity.
- **Social bond is still alive in the individualised society.**

2. A changing relation to work (#1/4)

- Individualisation goes through all areas of life, among which work:
 - In human resources management
 - » Focus on individuals till subjective mobilisation
 - » Multiplication of individualised plans.
 - In work situations
 - » Diversification of status, trajectories, relations to work.
 - In the meaning of employment
 - » From security of employment to employability.
 - In the meaning of competency
 - » From occupation/trade/profession to competencies – From know-how to know-how to be.
 - In the relation to work (see below)
 - » Rise of qualitative expectations – Polycentric conception of life.
 - In any case, individualisation is ambivalent:
 - » Constraints and expectations // opportunities and risks.

2. A changing relation to work (#2/4)

- Work as a value
 - Expressive versus instrumental expectations
 - » Expressive expectations are increasing (freedom, opportunities for self-development, recognition...).
 - For all generations but particularly for the youngest.
 - Polycentric conception of life
 - » Work is important in life but other areas (family...) too.
 - Contamination of gender models
 - » Change in the culture of the family and increasing centrality of work-life balance issues for both male and female workers.
 - Generations are different

Cf. SPReW project

2. A changing relation to work (#3/4)

■ Youth and collective involvement

- High social concern but few formal affiliation to collective bodies.
- Feeling of belonging is a complex issue. No direct link with membership.

■ Youth and trade union membership

- Correlation between level of education and membership.
- Correlation between work trajectories and membership (precariousness, experience of unemployment...).
- Social reproduction in membership.
- Why no membership?
 - » Not interested - 43.5%; Lack of information - 39.2%; Others - 17.3%

Cf. Survey FTU/CSC

2. A changing relation to work (#4/4)

■ Youth and trade union perception

- For a large majority a positive perception of trade union work. Rather a classical vision of trade union work (core business of trade unions).
- However, not globally convinced that trade unions are working for all categories of workers (for those in stable jobs).
- Lot of "no opinion".
- Positive impact of work experience:
 - » Membership increases with work experience.
 - » "No opinion" about trade unions turns in positive opinion with work experience.

Cf. Survey FTU/CSC

3. Transformation of collective involvement (#1/3)

- Collective involvement is not disappearing, it is changing
 - Solidarities are not disappearing, they are structured differently. They become both more local and global. They are more unsettled. They are built around time limited goals, they refer to shared values. They combine presence and distance.
 - Solidarities are not linked to predetermined belongings.
 - Solidarity is a built value.

Two types of social criticism and collective involvement

Social criticism through plans

- Characterise traditional militant bodies.
- Large hierarchical organisations, with adherents (membership principle).
- Importance of formal rules and structure.
- "us" is more important than "I" (collective voice).
- Delegation principle (pyramidal organisations).

Ex. trade unions, political parties

Social criticism through projects

- Characterise new forms of militancy.
- Spontaneous actions, networks of individuals (action principle).
- Short-lived mobilisation around concrete and immediate projects.
- Few formal rules, few clear boundaries between internal (us) and external (them).
- Personal involvement.

Ex. new social movements (environmental protection, altermondialists, paperless persons, homeless persons, AIDS, abuses against children...)

3. Transformation of collective involvement (#3/3)

- The relation to collectives is organised around networks, structured around projects with individuals (self) / subjects wishing to grasp their environment.
 - The network: structuration mode of a collective (open, changing, targeted, short-lived...)
 - The project: the element around which a collective is built. It takes shape and it organises the network.
 - The subject: an individual who wants to act ... with the others.

4. Future routes for trade unions (#1/6)

- As a starting point: wringing the neck of defeatist interpretations
- A new route
 - Trade unionism adapted (and is still adapting) himself to a new economic, organisational and technological context
 - » Multiplication of places and levels for negotiation (enterprise, regional, national, European...); multiplication of topics for negotiation (flexibility, training, quality of work, environmental issues...).

4. Future routes for trade unions (#2/6)

- Taking into account a new worker figure
 - Trade unionism has still to adapt himself to a new worker figure. This latter has both a different collective feeling and type of collective involvement. He is quite different from the traditional worker figure that was at the core of trade unionism during the last decades.
 - » The worker of the '70 and '80 is not the one of the '2000.
 - » The worker of the '2000 is also a woman.
 - It is important to think about solidarity and social bond again BOTH with the characteristics of the individuals who are concerned.

4. Future routes for trade unions (#3/6)

- How to organise different forms of solidarity?
 - Social criticism through plans / social criticism through projects – Looking for a halfway line.
 - Strength and weakness of both.
 - Incompatibilities and/or fears, well-founded and not.
 - Specific militant figures, convergences et divergences.
 - Favourite action means, cost / efficiency.

Social criticism through plans Traditional militant bodies	Social criticism through projects New forms of militancy
<p><u>Strenght</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stability ■ Cumulative expertise ■ Positioned and recognised as a social actor ■ Important resources of different kinds (financial, organisational, professionalism...) <p><u>Weakness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dividing up (internal/external) ■ Importance of the strucutre in comparison with individuals ■ Distance from field ■ Exces of rules ■ Controlled information ■ Ageing figure 	<p><u>Strenght</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Personal involvement ■ Opening ■ Close to challenges and results ■ Access to infromation / transparency ■ Reactivity/ rapidity of action ■ "Modern" figure <p><u>Weakness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disorganisation ■ Lack of durability ■ Efficiency ■ Need of a "catalyst" ■ All the topics cannot be handled in a project approach

Social criticism through plans Traditional militant bodies	Framed social criticism through projects New forms of militancy in traditional bodies	Social criticism through projects New forms of militancy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Large hierarchical organisations, with adherents (membership principle). ■ Importance of formal rules and structure. ■ "us" is more important than "I" (collective voice). ■ Delegation principle (pyramidal organisations). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Large organisations that have both vertical and horizontal networks. ■ Openness in boundaries (internal / external). ■ Formal rules and structure that give room for initiatives and individuals (self). ■ Flexibility potential ■ Areas of freedom ■ Working around projects based on a common vision and supported by a stable structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Spontaneous actions, networks of individuals (action principle). ■ Short-lived mobilisation around concrete and immediate projects. ■ Few formal rules, few clear boundaries between internal (us) and external (them). ■ Personal involvement.

4. Future routes for trade unions (#6/6)

- Redefining a trade union project that shows solidarity, "a rallying utopia"
 - Building something that gathers subject autonomy and the relation to others.
 - Rallying and federative values:
 - » Fight again exclusion (individualised network society produces "social outcasts" responsible for their exclusion).
 - » Respect / dignity.
 - » Social justice.
- Understanding nowadays forms of militancy
 - Militant involvement is part of the building of an identity (trade off between the militant and the organisation).
 - Forms of militancy (sporadic, action versus membership, involvement in multiple areas at the same time...).
 - Militancy modalities.

References

- **A book (in French)**
 - Patricia Vendramin, *Le travail au singulier, Le lien social à l'épreuve de l'individualisation (Single work, Social bond facing individualisation)* Académia Bruylant (Louvain-la-Neuve) - L'Harmattan (Paris), Collection "Sciences & enjeux", 2004, 290 pp.
- **A European research project: SPReW (in English)**
 - The objective of this project is to examine the factors leading to solidarity or tensions in intergenerational relations, in the specific area of work and correlated fields. Project funded under the 6th framework programme of the EU. A two-years project (started in June 2006). 6 countries involved.
 - Fondation Travail-Université, Patricia Vendramin (coordinator).
<http://www.ftu-namur.org/sprew>
- **A survey (in French)**
 - The survey was conducted for the youth department of the trade union CSC in Belgium. The topic is: youth, work, trade unions.
 - <http://www.ftu-namur.org/fichiers/Jeunes-travail-emploi.pdf>