

NEOLIBERALISM AND TRADEUNISM IN BRAZIL IN THE 2000'S

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The aim of this paper is to assess the impact of neoliberalism on Brazilian trade unionism. The two biggest Brazilian labour federations, the CUT (*Central Única dos Trabalhadores*) and the FS (*Força Sindical*), responded to neoliberal politics of 1990's in different ways. The FS's approach evidences support for neoliberalism, although its support was selective rather than unlimited. The CUT's course was more complex, fluctuating between adoption of some elements of neoliberal discourse to resistance toward neoliberal policies. Despite of these differences, both organizations moved towards a model called *'citizen unionism'* that in fact is a kind of providing service unionism. A principal characteristic of this new style of unionism is that it offers workers services that until then had been provided by the State. When opting for citizen unionism, unions help the neoliberal agenda and undermine labour rights. They undermine universal policies and encourage those of a limited and compensatory nature; and thus promote the individualization of the unemployment problem and blame unemployed workers for their own condition.

Nevertheless, the negative economic conditions at the end of the Cardoso administration undermined neoliberalism and enabled Lula's victory in the 2002 elections. The unions had an important role in that victory and gained political prominence in PT administration, being a partner in a *'neo-developmentalism'* politics. However, this close relationship between the party and some unions' leaders has caused conflicts and divisions, which led to a reorganization of the Brazilian labor movement and the creation of new union federation organizations.

The CUT has undergone a process of losing affiliate members, but remains the biggest labor federation in Brazil. The organizations that are opposed to neoliberalism and to PT administrations are still small and face difficulties to organize and mobilize workers. Despite this weakness, there were significant strikes in the last two years for which these organizations contributed, specially in building construction and educations sectors.

My hypothesis is that PT administrations reinforce two union conceptions apparently antagonistic, but complementary: i) they reinforce the social democracy because they consolidate a perspective of class collaboration and expand the institutional mechanisms available to unions act within the State. This does not mean that unionism drives the political agenda, but exerts some influence on it. Its influence can be seen in measures that do not touch the essential of the capitalist development model promoted by the PT administrations; b) PT administrations facilitate the defense of immediate economic interests, enabling *wage* increases and improvements to some bargain benefits.