

Industrial relations and trade unions in brazil



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Introduction

The development of the Brazilian system of industrial relations and its trade union movement, like in any other country is embedded in the formation of a sector of wage labor. The debate on trade unions and industrial relations systems is unison in recognize a crisis in the labor movement that developed since the 1980's decade, and much of the efforts were spent identifying the causes of the crisis and exploring pathways to overcome it. However, the debate was stated looking mainly to the situation of the developed countries, specially the US and Western Europe, and the immense diversity of scenarios on the Global South were kept at the fringes of the academic discussion. Part of the explanation is that the theory of industrial relations and trade unions, depends of the existence of a free population performing wage labor. As the most of the Global South was kept under colonial systems sometimes as far as the 1970's decade, and the labor regimes were much more similar to slavery or serfdom than to the regimes in Western societies, the wage labor in those regions has received few attention since the early developments of the fields.

Although being achieved independence from Portugal in 1822, the slavery was abolished only in 1888, giving birth to the Brazilian Research Question:

Literature Review:

As the thesis proposed is divided in three main sections, also the literature can be grouped in three relatively independent bodies. First, the effort to describe the Brazilian industrial relations system and the current role of trade unions start with the normative environment expressed in the Brazilian

laws, mainly the Consolidation of Labor Laws (Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho), enacted in 1943 in the period of Getúlio Vargas dictatorship, in autocratic manner, and despite being updated that is still under effect

The notion that workers have some power resources is present implicitly in the labor theories of value, and the assumption of the central role of labor in production brings the seed of the idea of structural power. As a development of this centrality of labor, the motto “ Workers of the world, unite!” is the recognition that the organization of workers is able to create power. In that way, most of the authors that considered the workers and the working class for analysis assume the existence and/or the possibility of creation of power resources and its relations with labor conflicts. However, to provide a clearer theoretical referential, is necessary to narrow the concept towards a tipification of the power resources available to workers.

The first sources to be considered is Perrone (1983, 1984) unfinished articles, both edited by Eric O. Wright. Aiming to operationalize a variable that explain the strike behavior and the wage levels in different economic sectors, the author presents a definition of “ positional power”[1]as the potential of a certain group of workers to generate disruption in the economic structure. In that sense, as higher the interdependence of the whole economy to a sector, higher is the positional power of the workers in that sector. To measure this variable Perrone uses an input-output matrix to account the dependence of the economy to a specific sector. The findings of the study is that despite the positional power can explain quite well differences in wage levels, the variable isn't sufficient to explain the strike propensity.

Concerned with the noncorrelation between positional power and the propensity to strike, Eric O. Wright, in the postscript of Perrone (1984), begins developing the concept of organizational power. He proposes the disruptive potential does not automatically leads to an effective bargaining power of workers, since a group of workers can be present low levels of solidarity and weak organizational resources. However, he sees the positional power as the main determinant of organizational power, assuming the disruptive potential as determinant of the cost-benefit trade-off in organizing and conducting collective actions. Wright states that we should expect very few cases of low organizational power in high positional power situation or the inverse.

Wright (2000) evolves his concept to “ associational power”, as the various forms of power that results from the collective organizations of workers, including “ *such things as unions and parties but may also include a variety of other forms, such as works councils or forms of institutional representation of workers on boards of directors in schemes of worker codetermination, or even, in certain circumstances, community organizations*” (p. 962). He maintain the concept of structural power as the resultant of the location of workers within the economic system. Analyzing the sites of class compromise, the author recognizes that is possible that an increasing in the associational power of workers can benefit the employers interests. He presents three institutional spheres of class conflict and consequently, sites where class compromise can be forged: *the sphere of exchange* , concerning labor market and all sort of commodity markets, being the labor unions as the expression of the associational power in this

sphere; *the sphere of production*, meaning the intra-firm relations, the labor processes and technological patterns, and the works councils as the expression of workers associational power; *the sphere of politics*, concerning the shaping and execution of state policies and the management of the state-enforced rules, with the political parties being the form of the associational power of workers. Seeking to understand the mechanisms that allows these different forms of workers associational power to forge positive compromises with the employers.

The main feature on the Wright's notion of power resources, for the purpose of the present proposal, is that he assumes *workers' organizations*, for instance unions, works councils and labor parties as the same as *workers' power*. This strong assumption disregards many concepts in industrial relations literature, by typifying the forms that workers organizations can assume. First, the different structures presented aren't common to the different industrial relations and political systems. Second, ignore the movement/organization dualism tracked by Hyman (2004: 2-3, 2000: 60-1) through the theory of trade unions. Third, other authors see a very different nature of workers' power, as presented below.

Elaborating the positional/structural source of workers power while looking to the workers in mass production industries, Arrighi and Silver (1984) divide the concept in market-place bargaining power of workers, as the power embodied in the scarcity of a specific skill possessed by workers, and in workplace bargaining power, as the "*power of workers when they are expending their labor-power within the course of capitalist labor process*" (pp 193-4). Although the concept is still incipient, it leads to a further strong

development, presented in Silver (2005). In this paper, she recover the concept of Wright (2000) for the associational power and put in detail the structural power and its subtypes: *marketplace bargaining power* that results directly from the labor markets, an can take several forms, as “(1) *the possession of scarce skills that are in demand by employers*, (2) *low levels of general unemployment*, and (3) *the ability of workers to pull out of the labor market entirely and survive on nonwage sources of income*” (2005: 13), and *workplace bargaining power*, identical to the Perrone’s concept of positional power. The conceptualization then is used to measure the in what extent the transformations in the organization of production and the process of globalization affected the workers’ power.

Based in large extent in the same theoretical framework developed by Wright and Silver, the Jena’s “ power resource approach” (Dörre *et al.*, 2009) contribute adding a new dimension to the dimensions of workers’ power, *the institutional power*, meaning the incorporation of the organizational and structural power into social institutions. They argue that Silver ignored this dimension of power, what is very improbable, since she assumes that the “ *associational power has been embedded in state legal frameworks that guaranteed such things as the right to form trade unions as well as the obligation of employers to bargain collectively with trade unions*” (2005: 14).

The authors, with help of others, advance in the conceptualization of workers power, adding a new dimension, the *societal power* (Dörre and Schmalz, 2013). The authors then build an explicit typification of the various dimensions of power, presented below.

	Structural Power	Associational Power	Institutional Power	Societal Power
Forms of practice	Interruption of capital appropriation	Formation of workers	Reference to chartered rights	Interaction with other societal actors
Shop floor level	Labor unrest Job change	Workers committee Works council Shop stewards	Works constitution	Cooperation and discursive power exceed inevitably the boundaries between these distinct levels
Inter-company level	Economic strikes	Trade unions	Free collective bargaining	

			Constituti
			on
Societal	Political	Workers	
level	strikes	parties	Laws and
			legislatio
			n

Of course this typification is not the only one possible, and others will be considered and treated in the further research process for the master thesis, in order to compare and integrate, if valuable and feasible, to the theoretical framework. In advance, two alternative approaches, although being largely intersected, will be examined, namely the typifications developed by Donna McGuire and Christian Lévesque and Gregor Murray various articles.

(tipyfication not valid all the times, organisation dont means power because of bureacratization, but related with Jena PRA “ organisational power is a resource that can only be acquired through strategically planned collective action and formal organisation” WP and WO only are close related when the workers have the control of the organisation...parties can serve to individual promotion or pursuit political power per se, WC can be coopted by management or signify promotion on carrer, and unions can develop leaders dettached from its social basis (trough institutionalisation)

[1]The author uses “ positional power” and “ structural power” as sinonyms.