

ETUI-ETUC Conference, 27-29 June 2016, Brussels

Shaping the new world of work – The impacts of digitalisation and robotisation

Panel 22: Dealing with change: New Roles and Capabilities for Trade Unions

Participants:

- Gregor Murray, Université de Montréal & CRIMT
- Vincent Pasquier, Grenoble École de Management
- Valeria Pulignano, KUL
- Christian Lévesque, HEC Montréal

Discussant: Lionel Fulton, LRD

Moderator: Marc-Antonin Hennebert, HEC Montréal

Reporter: Marc-Antonin Hennebert, HEC Montréal

The role of trade unions is changing, demanding new approaches. This workshop explores that challenge in terms of the implications of these new roles for union resources, capabilities and power. It draws on examples of transnational multi-level bargaining campaigns (Gregor Murray), of the use of social media in international unions campaigns (Vincent Pasquier), of articulating between EWCs and local levels on the issue of inequality (Valeria Pulignano), and of the impact of the integration of digital media on trade unions' capabilities and power resources (Christian Lévesque, Marc-Antonin Hennebert, Catherine Le Capitaine and Vincent Pasquier).

Summary of the presentation:

Gregor Murray :

- Two case studies within the same MNC (Rio Tinto) at Boron (California, USA) and Alma (Quebec, Canada)
- Two industrial dispute (lock-out) at the two plant but for different reasons:
 - o the main issue in Alma was the subcontracting
 - o the main issue in Boron was related to the seniority
- 2 union victories that involved deploying multiple union resources: Internal solidarity; name and shame tactics; Global Union Federation facilitation; contentious politics; articulating different levels of action.
- Lessons from the two cases for unions:
 - o Engage conversation with members (if possible on a daily basis)
 - o Engage conversation with community
 - o Frame the issues: link with members and communities

Vincent Pasquier:

- A one case study : the ‘fight for 15 and a union campaign’ in the USA
- This campaign was built on a specific narrative : not a union campaign but a fast food worker campaign
- This campaign use a new mean of action so-called ‘Flash Protest’
- Defining the Flashmob logic of unionism: Mobilizing through ‘Flash Protest’ which stages the spontaneity and grassroots-ness orchestrated ‘behind the scene’ and designed to swarm beyond traditional audience!
- The hybrid logic of Flashmob unionism:
 - o The traditional logic of union activism
 - o The new ‘Occupy-like’ logic of connective action
- The key success factors of the Flashmob logic of unionism
 - Its legitimacy
 - Its virality
 - Its great cost-efficiency ratio (?)
- 2) The growing role of social media
 - o *Amplifying*
 - o *Framing*
 - o *Swarming*
- Results of the campaign: amazing success for unions in New York, Colorado; Seattle, etc.

Christian Lévesque:

- Impact of digital economy on trade union capacity
- Specific context: less wage earners in companies and more self-employed entrepreneurs
- Connective action and collective action: connective action need to be integrated into collective action !
- Succession of different union model: Craft model – Industrial model – Digital era
 - o Craft model:
 - Narratives : access to representation, worker dignity
 - Network : mainly horizontal
 - o Industrial union:
 - Narrative: increase working conditions and purchasing power
 - Network: vertical link
 - Resources: Multiples (golden age)
 - o Digital era:
 - Narrative: inequalities, voice, dignity, access to collective representation
 - Network: increase in horizontal links (community based)
- Similarities between the craft model and the digital era.

Valeria Pulignano:

- Articulation and the role of EWC: explaining the social effects within (and across) transnational workplaces

- The missing link around articulation:
 - o Europeanization of IR - insufficient articulation between EU and national level information and consultation structures;
 - o Weak empirical evidence on how articulation may look like and how it can benefit workers and unions dealing with change;
 - o How far can articulation support labour power (Fairbrother et al., 2013) by creating ‘resources and capabilities’ (Levesque and Murray, 2010) for unions
- EWC and articulation: “Spill-over” effects
 - o ‘Pull’ and ‘push’ processes (Sisson and Marginson, 2002)
 - o *Spill-over effects of EWCs in the different fields of IR ,*
 - o *EWCs and the continuous engagement in the negotiation and the implementation of EFAs*
 - o Institutional arrangements for collective resources for workers (“associational power” i.e. Wright, 2000);
 - o *EFAs as transnational institutional arrangements generating collective resources for workers which help unions benefiting of ‘positive gains’ across-borders*
- Why do unions need articulation?
 - o To guarantee equality amongst workplaces while strengthening common interests across workers in transnational workplaces;
- 16 cases in total; four per MNC (Machine, Train, Satellite, Auto) and per country (Belgium, Italy, Denmark, UK)
 - 2x2 comparison ...
 - High-tech vs. low-tech
 - High vs. low degree of market competition
 - Standardized vs. differentiated products
 - Vertical vs. horizontal integration
 - Comparison holds in terms of size, union presence and sector
- Findings: the “negative” trade-offs
- **Machine:**
 - o Progressive increase of flexibility resulting from benchmarking
 - o Facilitated by the standardized nature of the product and low technology within a vertically integrated structure
 - o Union agree concessions on flexibility/ security
 - o → **Flexibility was conceded against security**
- **Auto**
 - o High levels of flexibility, reinforced by benchmarking, Jit, production
 - o Facilitated by the standardized nature of the product and low technology in a de-verticalised (horizontal) structure
 - o No concession but imposed flexibility with no security in exchange
 - o → **Flexibility without security**
- **Train:**

- High degree of specialization of plants, high technology, differentiated products vertically integrated structure, reduced benchmarking
- The presence of EFA (2011) on training and mobility created a ‘transnational’ resource for employment security
- EWC implemented the EFA by creating channels of communication with national employee representatives; ETUFs coordinated networking and communication across borders and at different levels – “positive gains”
- → **Consensual arrangements on flexibility and security**
- **Satellite:**
 - Horizontal integration, high product specialisation and entry barriers entail job guarantees independently of whether flexibility is reduced or increased
 - EFAs (2009-2010) supported job retention also in situation of unions being threatened by collective redundancy because of restructuring;
 - EWC role in the implementation of EFA ; ETUFs facilitated cross-borders union coordination and collaboration, particularly during restructuring –
 - → **Security independently on flexibility**
- The strategic capacity of the unions could be enhanced through institutional means;
 - Conversely to *Auto* and *Machine* where unions settled for the “second best option” (exchange of flexibility for short-term job guarantee if possible), unions in *Train* and *Satellite* could use EFA as an institutional resource to reinforce their participation in the shaping of flexibility into employment security;
 - In *Satellite* and *Train* subsidiaries union benefited from the “positive gains” achieved by other unions in local negotiations;
 - Articulation between EU and local ERs levels was facilitated through EWCs engaging in the negotiation and implementation of EFA (spill over) by transferring to local ERS the ‘positive gains’ of EFA;
 - Co-ordination by ETUFs.