

## Call for papers vol 4 issue 2 (November 2012)

### For the global emancipation of labour: new movements and struggles around work, workers and precarity

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Once, the labour movement was seen as *the* international social movement for the left (and it was the spectre haunting capitalism). Over the last century, however, labour movements have been transformed. In most of the world membership rates have dwindled, and many act in defence of, or simply provide services to, their members in the spirit of interest or lobbying groups. Labour was once a broad social movement including cooperatives, socialist parties, women's and youth wings, press and publications, cultural production and sporting clubs. Often it was at the core of movements for democracy or national independence, even of social revolution. Despite the rhetoric of "socialism", "class and mass trade unionism" or, alternatively, technocratic "organising strategies", most union movements internationally operate strictly within the parameters of capitalism and the ideology of "social partnership" (i.e. with and under capital and state).

New labour organising efforts are increasingly moving beyond traditional trade union forms, dependence on the state or parties of the left, and have found new forms linked to ethnic or geographical communities, working women, precarious workers, migrants and other radical-democratic social movements.

These changes may relate to the neoliberalisation and "globalization" of capitalism, and its result in restructured industry and employment. They may also relate to the consequent disorientation of the left. Transformations at the political and economic level have not, however, meant the disappearance of labour movement. Multiple new expressions of labour discontent arise from the bases and the margins of the world of work.

#### **New forms of organising and/or a revival?**

Firstly, from the *bases* we find movements of workers, often in alliance with local communities or other social movements. They are to be found not only in advanced industrial and postindustrial economies, but also — more dramatically — at the capitalist periphery. Labour movements were important in the recent Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings. In the world's second biggest economy, China, labour has been flexing its muscles in the most repressive and difficult of

circumstances. Labour struggle has also begun to revive in the United States, and in the most dramatic fashion with the occupation of the legislature in Wisconsin.

Secondly, we see those who are situated at the margins of labour markets and who experience continuous uncertainty. Increasingly addressed as the "precariat", this includes both high-skilled and low-skilled workers in the rich metropolises of the global North as well as in the slums and fields of the global South. The precarious are younger people, women and migrants, but increasingly those previously full-time workers whose rights and conditions are under attack due to the current economic crisis.

New and emergent movements are taking place at the local, national and transnational level, signaling the ongoing transformation of workers' struggle all over the world. As capitalism reorganises, expands and reinvents, so too does resistance to its exploitation and subjugation. Some trade unions have encountered difficulty in working amongst workers who do not conform to the model of the full-time, male, family-wage-earning worker, and are seeking new ways of mobilizing and organising. This has been equally true amongst landless workers in Brazil, as with "undocumented" or "excluded" labour in California. Both at the bases and at the margins of the labour realms, women, men and youth are experimenting with radical new forms of struggle, new demands, new places / spaces of articulation, and perhaps re-discovering or re-inventing a global movement for "the emancipation of labour".

### **Some places to start?**

This issue of *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* seeks to reflect both this immense richness of experiences and the attempt to articulate what has been learnt in one place in ways that may be useful for activists elsewhere. We are looking for articles that tackle questions such as:

- How are the geography and politics of labour struggles changing in the 21st century?
- What use, and clarity, is there in the distinction between "old" (labour) and "new" social movements?
- Is the historically central link with political parties and the state dead or can it be reinvented, and if so, how?
- Have strategies such as "social movement unionism", "community unionism", "bio-syndicalism", recognising precarity or movements organising informal workers been effective and how far? Where and to what extent are they successful?
- What are the strengths and limits of labour organising among those for whom wage labour is only a part of their livelihood?
- What are the relationships between trade unions on the one hand, and on the other hand solidarity economy movements, organisations working with

precarious and unemployed workers, and identity- or community-based groups and the labour movement?

- How are trade unionists engaging, or failing to engage, with the global justice and solidarity movement?
- Are there new trade union or labour internationalism(s), and what form or forms demonstrate this?
- What is the significance of information and communication technology (ICT), "knowledge workers" and labour's own cyberspace activities to such new worker movements?

We intend to explore such matters in this special issue of the new open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal, *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>).

### **General submissions**

Finally, as in all issues of *Interface*, we will accept submissions on topics that are not related to the special theme of the issue, but that emerge from or focus on movements around the world and the immense amount of knowledge that they generate. Such general submissions should contribute to the journal's mission as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements — in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews — and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Afrikaans, Arabic, Catalan, Croatian, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Latvian, Maltese, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Zulu. Please see our editorial contacts page for details of who to submit to.

### **Deadline and contact details**

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published November 2012, is May 1 2012. For details of how to submit to *Interface*, please see the "Guidelines for contributors". All manuscripts, whether on the special theme or other topics, should be sent to the appropriate regional editor. Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page.