
Labour organising across productive and reproductive relations in India: a comparative labour regime perspective

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Résumé

This presentation draws on multiple fieldwork over two decades in various regions of India in which industrial restructuring has proceeded in varying forms and degrees of technological change, outsourcing, informalisation of employment, intensification of the labour process, and relocation/ consolidation of production. At the same time, there have been diverse responses by labour organising and movements to the different trajectory of industrial restructuring.

In many regions and sectors, industrial restructuring has led to undermining of traditional collective bargaining institutions characterised by industrial or regional bargaining involving central trade union organisations (CTUOs) typically affiliated to political parties, and with the state playing coordinating or mediating roles. But even in cases where state-coordinated collective bargaining mechanisms and established forms of trade unions have remained resilient, and ‘accepted’ institutionalised recourse for dispute resolution and gains have been secured, paradoxically, this has also limited the scope for alternative forms of mobilisation. In particular, this has meant that established CTUOs have traditionally been ineffective in, and sometimes even reluctant to mobilise workers in informal employment.

In other cases, where there have been (re)emergence of labour institutions and organising, mobilisation involved new generations of workers outside the established institutional framework of dispute resolution. Unions and labour organisations linking their workplace-level struggles to broader solidarity movements was crucial for effective mobilisation on their own terms. This included mobilisation around informalisation of employment but also social reproduction issues around homeplace-based relations, housing, healthcare, and environment. It also involved state and institutional mediation as sites for labour struggle, but in a different way from traditional mechanisms of dispute resolutions. But again, it has been observed that particular ways in which productive and reproductive struggles are linked have been contingent upon the specific history and context of the mobilisation.

This presentation proposes a labour regime approach as a way to understand diverse responses by labour organising and movements to the different trajectory of industrial restructuring by emphasising the co-constitutive processes of productive and reproductive struggles.

Mots-Clés: Productive and reproductive struggles, Trade union, Labour organising, Informalisation, Industrial restructuring, India

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