The Dilemmas of the New Unionism in Brazil: Breaks and Continuities

Ricardo Antunes and Marco Aurélio Santana

Latin American Perspectives 2014 41: 10
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X14541228

The Dilemmas of the New Unionism in Brazil

Breaks and Continuities

by
Ricardo Antunes and Marco Aurélio Santana
Translated by
Luis Alberto Hernández

Brazil's "new unionism," which emerged in the late 1970s, declared itself class-oriented, autonomous, and independent of the state. It proposed to take the lead in defense of eliminating the exploitation of labor by capital and of the real possibility of constructing of a socialist society. Identifying with the most dynamic sector of the working class, it expanded the participation of organized workers in the struggle for their demands. Over time, however, with changes in the political conjuncture and the introduction of neoliberal economic policies, the movement became more institutionalized—retreating from confrontation, devoting increasing attention to electoral politics, and giving more emphasis to hierarchical and bureaucratized leadership. Despite its many achievements, it proved incapable of putting down roots within companies or reducing social inequalities. Overemphasizing the idea of a complete break with the past may have prevented it from giving appropriate attention to the difficulties historically confronted by the labor movement in Brazil.

O "novo sindicalismo" que surgiu no Brasil nos fins dos anos 1970 se declarou de classe, autônomo e independente do Estado. Propôs-se assumir a liderança na eliminação da exploração da classe trabalhadora pelo capital, e de conseguir a construção duma sociedade verdadeiramente socialista. Por identificar-se com o sétor mais dinâmica da classe operária, ampliou a participação dos trabalhadores sindicatados na luta para conseguir as suas reivindicações. Sem embargo, ao correr o tempo, com as mudanças na conjuntura política e a introdução de políticas econômicas neoliberais, o movimento pouco a pouco se ia institucionalizando-se, evitando os confrontos, dedicando mais e mais atenção às políticas eleitorais, e enfatizando a liderança hierárquica e burocratizada. Apesar das muitas melhoras que conseguira, se mostrou incapaz de lançar raizes nas empresas, nem reduzir as desigualidades sociais. Tal vez fora, por ter enfatizado demais a ideia de uma ruptura total com o passado, que se impediu de pagar atenção adequada às dificuldades que o movimento operário sempre enfrentarem históricamente, e ainda enfrenta, no Brasil.

Ricardo Antunes is a professor of sociology at the University of Campinas and the author of *The Meanings of Work* (2012) and *¿Adios al trabajo?* (1999). Marco Aurélio Santana is a professor in the Department of Sociology and the Postgraduate Program in Sociology and Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the author of *Homens partidos: Comunistas e sindicatos no Brasil* (2001) and *Bravos companheiros: Comunistas e metalúrgicos no Rio de Janeiro (1945–1964)* (2012). Luis Alberto Hernández, a freelance translator/interpreter in the Philadelphia area, has an M.A. in communications from Temple University. This article is a greatly amended and expanded version of one published recently in *A ditadura que modou o Brazil*, edited by Daniel Aarão Reis, Marcelo Ridenti, and Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2014).

LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 198, Vol. 41 No. 5, September 2014, 10–21
DOI: 10.1177/0094582X14541228

Keywords: *Brazilian unionism, New unionism, Central Única dos Trabalhadores, Partido dos Trabalhadores*

More than 30 years after the emergence of the "new unionism" (*novo sindicalismo*) in Brazil with the creation of the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Union Central—CUT) in 1983 as one of its major achievements, it is possible to take stock of what happened during these years. What were its main achievements and setbacks? Did its union practice consolidate a break with the past, or did it end up accommodating itself to the practice of the more traditional labor movement? These are the questions that we will try to answer in this article.

The late 1970s were extremely important years for the Brazilian labor movement. Hard hit by the military coup of 1964, labor had been left with little or no room for maneuver aside from clandestine work in factories and isolated attempts at confrontation. After a decade, however, the movement had returned to action, demanding the expansion of opportunities to represent the interests of the working class. Its reemergence disrupted the political arrangements that were being put in place in the transition from military dictatorship to civilian and democratic rule.

This reemergence of a national labor movement was characterized in part by competition between the political and union projects of different sectors of the left. The product of this conjuncture, the new unionism emerged from the articulation of competing political positions. It proposed a break with the past, opposing the old unonism's prevailing class collaboration, reformism, conciliation, and top-down action (*cupulismo*). Leveling many of its criticisms at the labor union structure associated with the state, the new unionism developed through alternative routes. The CUT was both its result and its driving force, and, despite its alleged basic antipolitics, some of its elements participated in the creation of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party—PT) and accompanied the latter to power in the 2002 presidential elections through one of its favorite sons, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

The new unionism is currently facing a set of dilemmas with regard to its basic practices and discourses. It has undergone an important process of redefinition that has incorporated proposals quite different from those it defended in its beginnings. This change in its ideology and its practices reflects the construction of a new union identity. The longevity of this union project demands a broad assessment of its development and trajectory.

THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP AND THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW UNIONISM

The structure of the Brazilian labor movement was formed during the Getúlio Vargas period in the 1930s, when labor legislation was put in place guaranteeing the control of the unions by the state in both financial and organizational, political, and ideological terms. This was a powerful framework because the application and effectiveness of the legislation were linked to the

life of the official union, thus dealing a heavy blow to the existing autonomous union movement, which, although small, continued to hold out (Antunes, 1995; Araújo, 1998).

Reoriented by the new legal and political framework, unions were limited in their class-based aspirations. They found their new profile in a predominantly assistentialist function, although they still had the right to negotiate wages for their work categories. Articulating, in an often contradictory way, handouts and manipulation, recognition of labor rights and repression, assistentialism and control, Varguista unionism was validated by labor legislation and promoted the myth of Vargas as the "father of the poor" through what the regime considered the concessions of that legislation (Vianna, 1976). However, on various occasions the official union, led by leftist groups, went beyond the guidelines imposed on it by the government, for example, in strikes and the creation of grassroots labor organizations. This produced the idea of an articulation between actions inside and outside of the official union structure. While this structure functioned as a limiting factor and even as a mechanism of control of class actions, it would be a mistake to think that it prevented those organizations from trying to represent their more immediate interests (Santana and Antunes, 2007).

The official union's main objective was to eliminate autonomous unionism in Brazil. Limited in its opportunities to represent the interests of labor without constraints, in 1931 state unionism created the concept of *unicidade sindical* (labor unity) and consolidated its organizational structure of federations and confederations. Its assistentialist practice continued to expand, and by the late 1930s the Ministry of Labor's control over unions had increased tremendously, especially with creation of the *imposto sindical* (union tax) and a framework labor law. These acts were reinforced in 1943 with the creation of the Consolidação das Leis do Trabalho (Consolidation of Labor Laws—CLT). Nevertheless, the labor movement was able to open up alternatives to state control. In the 1950s, for example, led by an alliance of militants from the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party—PCB) and the reformist Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Workers' Party—PTB), the labor movement made great strides in terms of organization and mobilization both within and outside the union structure. These efforts led to greater participation of workers in social life and in national politics (Santana, 1997; 2001)

Oscillating between state control and resistance, unionism found its principal base in the state corporations (railroads, ports, transports), a sector in which the PCB had a strong presence. This led to the creation of the Comando Geral dos Trabalhadores (General Workers' Command—CGT), which joined forces with other popular organizations such as the União Nacional dos Estudantes (National Students' Union—UNE) and the Ligas Camponesas (Peasant Leagues) with the goal of implementing some basic reforms (e.g., agrarian, urban, higher education) during the presidency of João Goulart (Delgado, 1986; Telles, 1962) Despite all these efforts and achievements, and after more than a decade of intense growth and activity, the organizational structure of Brazilian workers (both its base and its leadership) was heavily damaged by the coup of 1964. The military that staged the coup declared that one of the main justifications for it was the need to put a stop to the establishment of a "workers' republic" in Brazil.

The military coup of 1964 greatly strengthened state control over unions and triggered the intense repression of the most militant unions, especially those led by the communist and reformist cadres. This repression was of extreme importance for the post-1964 capitalist reorganization, which brought with it the demise of the core reforms, the destruction of unionism, and the imposition of a conservative orientation. These measures helped to provoke the reduction of wages that was required to accelerate the monopolist and oligopolistic accumulation demanded by capital (Santana and Antunes, 2007). The dictatorship immediately declared the CGT illegal and announced the replacement of the leaders of more than 100 labor organizations. Needless to say, the strongest assault was on the organizations led by the communist-worker alliance. Persecution, prison, and exile of leaders and militants and the dismantling of work in unions and factories became common currency. Many activities and projects were abandoned; what was left was clandestine and silent organizing on the factory floor (Frederico, 1987; Santana and Antunes, 2007). It was necessary to reassemble the scattered social forces and combine efforts to confront the dictatorship. For a whole generation of union militants this was the end of the road. The union scene had become inhospitable to action, moving all political activities onto the factory floor, and militants suffered from the collaborative work of the information branches of companies and the state's organs of repression.

During this period new trends in the economy were intensifying, bringing about a profound transformation of the country and especially of its working class. The acceleration of the introduction of modern industrial plants and their geographical concentration (a process that had begun in the late 1950s) made possible the emergence of what has been called a new working class, and these were the actors who emerged as key players in the final crisis of the military dictatorship. Beginning with the 1964 coup, then, the conditions were being put in place for the expansion of industrial accumulation. These changes resulted in a significant growth of a new industrial proletariat heavily concentrated in the automotive and metallurgical industrial belt of the ABC region of São Paulo (Almeida, 1975; Antunes, 1988; Frederico, 1979; Humphrey, 1982)

This expansion of the working class provided the principal social base for the new unionism, of which Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was the most prominent leader. This movement began to reach and connect with industrial workers such as steelworkers, rural wage earners (the so-called *bóias-frias*), civil servants, and the urban salaried middle sectors (e.g., doctors and professors), who were experiencing rapid proletarization. The service sector and agriculture were also creating new contingents of wage earners that greatly expanded the new working class.

THE 1980S AND THE ADVANCES OF THE NEW UNIONISM

The second half of the 1970s witnessed the outbreak of widespread strikes, beginning with the Scania strike in São Bernardo in May 1978. In the following years, particularly in the second half of the 1980s, Brazil came to occupy the top of the list of capitalist countries with the highest strike rates. These were

general strikes by category (e.g., bank workers in 1985), strikes involving the occupation of factories (e.g., at General Motors in São José dos Campos in 1985 and Companhia Siderúrgica Nacional in Volta Redonda in 1988), and strikes by company that spread throughout the country and to practically all manufacturing sectors. The country also witnessed the outbreak of four national general strikes, of which the one in March 1989, right after the collapse of the Cruzado Plan, was the most dramatic and significant (Antunes, 1995; 2013).

It was in this context of a significant reemergence of unionism that the union centrals were born. The most important of them, the CUT, was created in 1983. Inspired by the new unionism and the direct heir of the union struggles that were emerging everywhere, the CUT brought together many social forces—the new unionism, with the Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de São Bernardo (Union of Steelworkers of Sao Bernardo) as its major example; the opposition movement conducting its activities outside the official union structure, of which the Movimento de Oposição Metalúrgica de São Paulo (Opposition Steelworkers' Movement of Sao Paulo) was the best example; and rural unionism, which was also expanding its field of action (Antunes, 1995; Giannotti and Neto, 1991; L. M. Rodrigues, 1990; I. J. Rodrigues, 1997).

This articulation of various forces gave the CUT a clear direction in total opposition to state unionism, which found itself increasingly subordinated and constrained by the dictatorial and repressive measures instituted immediately after the coup. These measures, as we have seen, had dismantled the union organizations led by the communists and the workers contesting the official hegemony. In its founding manifesto the CUT defended the creation of an organization built from the base that was class-oriented, autonomous, and independent of the state. In addition, it proposed to take the lead in the defense of a society without exploitation between capital and labor, aiming at the real possibility of assisting in the construction of a socialist society. This proposal was not just words; it had a concrete aspect in the practice of the majority of the unions whose aim was achieving the principal aspiration of the Brazilian working class, the creation of its own central, autonomous and uncoupled from the state. The advances achieved through organizing activities in the workplace and the creation of various factory committees and base groups linked to the new unionism and other oppositional unions were decisive for the effective defense of union autonomy and freedom with respect to the state. Thus, the struggle on many fronts against the union tax, the confederational and top-down union structure, and the control of the Ministry of Labor over the creation of unions clearly demonstrated that opposition to the corporatism that characterized the official union structure was central to the project.

In 1983 Brazil was experiencing a more favorable context for this new unionism because the fight against the dictatorship and for the democratization of Brazilian society had been broadened greatly with the new student movement actions, the campaign for direct presidential elections, and the wave of strikes mentioned above. In this conjuncture, the flow in the union sector was moving in the opposite direction from that in the most advanced capitalist countries, with their crises of unionism and regressive economic measures. The new unionism was making progress against this current of antiunion tendencies. The 1980s were a glorious decade in the development of social movements in

Brazil, and the new unionism was at the forefront of these social struggles. Together with the PT, founded in 1980, and the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Workers—MST), founded in 1984, the new unionism took a leadership role in the campaign for direct presidential elections in 1985; participated actively in the organization of four general strikes that were brutally suppressed; defended the interests of the working class during the Constitutional Assembly; and played a key role during the presidential elections of 1989. These collaborative efforts reinforced its achievements (Antunes, 1995; I. J. Rodrigues, 1997; Santana, 1999).

Perhaps the most emblematic example of the new unionism's achievements is the content of the Constitution of 1988. This document, despite its limitations in many respects, enshrined advances in union organizing such as guaranteeing the right to strike and the right of civil servants to organize and putting an end of the *estatuto padrão* (the labor law imposed by the military dictatorship), while preserving the principle of *unicidade sindical* and the union tax, among other restrictive elements. The election of the Constitutional Assembly in 1986 took place in response to the strong impact of the Sarney government's Cruzado Plan. After the election the government was accused by the opposition of an electoral swindle because, while the votes were still being counted, it suspended the Cruzado Plan, having left it in place just long enough to win a substantial majority of the votes of people who were happy with its price controls.

The left and other progressive sectors continued to encounter limits to more militant action, even more so with the formation of the "Central," made up of the most conservative and regressive sectors in national politics. Joining forces with the popular sectors and echoing their most urgent demands, the progressive groups and the left tried to rewrite the Brazilian constitution in a less conservative mode and with a more social orientation. For example, one of the instruments used in the drafting process was the popular amendment. Among the 122 popular amendments proposed, the conference committee received one in support of agrarian reform with the impressive number of 1 million signatures endorsing it and another in favor of stable employment backed by 500,000 signatures. Both amendment proposals had the support of numerous civil society organizations, among them the unions, which had worked hard to gather the signatures needed throughout the country. Workers and their organizations were mobilized in an effort to see their interests reflected in the constitution. However, these groups worked together on some issues while being divided on others depending on their particular political positions, and they also faced fierce opposition from the center and the right.

The conservative sectors and the employers did not welcome the introduction of so many rights into the constitution, arguing that making labor rights constitutional would limit the bargaining process and add to companies' costs, generating dismissals and unemployment. The left and the most progressive sectors argued that making labor rights constitutional was crucial for its benefits to workers and would guarantee that those rights would be respected. The Constitutional Assembly met from 1986 to 1988, and on September 22, 1988, in the plenary of the House of Representatives, the final text of the constitution was adopted. The vote was 474 for, 15 against, with 6 abstentions. The no votes

came from PT representatives who criticized the constitution's main thrust, claiming that it blocked the more profound changes needed in a period of increasing social and union struggles in Brazil.

The leadership of the CUT and the PT was not, however, without its problems. The need to elect representatives, mayors, and governors and the increasing pressure of a wide range of issues produced serious disagreements between the PT and some of the new unions. The question was raised whether the strike, until then the cornerstone of combative unionism, would help or hinder electoral candidates as the party broadened its institutional space with more and more electoral victories. Despite these problems and impelled by a victorious "union decade," at the end of this period a representative of the new unionism, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, arrived at the first direct presidential elections in 1989 as a strong and viable contender with an alternative economic and political project for Brazil. His defeat in that election was a signal that the next decade would be marked by setbacks for the working class.

Both the PT and the CUT began to change. The party was becoming more institutionalized, and increasingly it was entering into broader alliances—something common in politics but rejected by the party in the past. The new unionism was also becoming institutionalized, beginning to question, for example, the validity of the strike as an instrument of immediate struggle. The era of the so-called constructive unionism and conflictive cooperation had arrived (Antunes, 1995; Nogueira, 1998; I. J. Rodrigues, 1997). Given the major changes in the national and international political conjuncture—among them the defeat of the left in the 1989 elections, the institution of a new economic plan, the restructuring of production, and the fall of the Berlin Wall—the 1990s were marked by the consolidation of this reorientation in the practices of both the PT and the CUT. A retreat from confrontation and increasing attention to electoral politics became the norm. Despite its defeats in the presidential elections of 1994 and 1998, the PT was becoming more firmly established and consolidating its presence at the municipal and state levels. It already constituted a clear political alternative.

THE NEOLIBERAL DECADE AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF PRODUCTION

The first regressive tendencies began to appear in the late 1980s, especially with the victory of Fernando Collor in 1989. Little by little, the new unionism was confronted with an adverse political and economic situation and began to get bogged down in difficulties that led it to go against its original principles. Pressure to find a new way of incorporating Brazil into the international division of labor meant a rapid restructuring of production, even greater financialization of the economy, the free circulation of capital, the privatization of state industries, and the flexibilization of labor laws (Alves, 2000; Cardoso, 2003; Druck, 1999).

During the long period of the military dictatorship and even during the New Republic, Brazil still had not succeeded in restructuring production as neoliberalism required. However, the situation changed completely under the Collor

government. Because of the intense corruption that characterized his presidency, a broad political and social movement erupted in 1992 and led to his impeachment. For the first time, the CUT's leadership accepted a proposal for negotiations with the Collor government, something that was not without controversy within the organization.

After the impeachment of Collor and the brief interim government of Vice President Itamar Franco, Fernando Henrique Cardoso was elected president in 1994 and reelected in 1998. His government set in motion a series of measures that totally transformed the economic landscape, including a sweeping wave of privatizations in the public industrial sector (steel, telecommunications, electric power, banking). The increasing presence of national and foreign capital in this sector of the economy transformed the tripod that had structured the Brazilian economy up to that point. While public capital maintained an important presence in some branches of the economy, such as the oil industry, key components of the public industrial sector were privatized and passed into the hands of transnational capital, further internationalizing the Brazilian economy. These processes had serious social consequences, particularly for the CUT and the new unionism. Deregulation, flexibilization, privatization, and deindustrialization became the dominant trends in the economy, and as a result the country saw an increase in levels of informality, outsourcing, underemployment, and unemployment. These transformations created a plethora of forms of precarious and informal work (Alves, 2000; Antunes, 2006; Druck, 1999; Ramalho and Martins, 1994). Meanwhile, the proportion of the labor market represented by services increased significantly, further expanding the range of workers in informal jobs.

In 1995, early in the presidency of Cardoso, an important strike of oil workers was brutally suppressed. All the resources available—the police, the army, the courts, and the media—were used against the strikers in an effort to make them an example as Margaret Thatcher had with the miners. This was, in fact, the first test of Cardoso's neoliberal policies, and therefore the country had to be taught a lesson in a very harsh way. This strike also revealed growing tensions and divisions within the CUT. Already more open to consultation and negotiation, it was severely criticized for its disunity and its failure to offer clear support to the oil workers. This was an expression of differences within the CUT that would deepen throughout the 2000s. With the defeat of this important strike the restructuring of the productive sector began in earnest, in line with the prescriptions of the Washington consensus. Flexibilization, deregulation, outsourcing, deindustrialization, and financialization became the dominant practices, and resisting them became more and more difficult.

This new reality made the new unionism more moderate and defensive. It began to assume a more flexible appearance with the emergence of a unionism more in tune with the neoliberal project. Created in 1991, the Força Sindical (Union Force) polarized the area of workers' representation (L. M. Rodrigues and Cardoso, 1993). The CUT, driven by its hegemonic element, the Articulação Sindical (Union Articulation), increasingly aligned itself with union experiments based on European social democratic unionism. Contrary to its original objectives, its aim became implementing a more contractualist, constructive, institutionally strong, and top-down unionism capable of constituting a viable

alternative to neoliberalism. Its defense of tax relief for the automotive industry as a mechanism for revitalizing it while preserving jobs, its support for incentives for the "sectorial chambers," and its constant participation in other tripartite forums and areas of negotiation drove it away from the values espoused at its creation (Galvão, 2007).

The new unionism of the golden years began to be replaced by the politics of consultation and conciliation, practices the CUT had once strongly rejected. The politics of agreements, financial support, and collaboration with social democratic unionism, practiced widely for two decades, also helped to reorient the new unionism, giving more emphasis to institutionalized spaces and highly hierarchical and bureaucratized union leadership. This reorientation increasingly reduced its emphasis on the struggle for autonomy, independence, and union freedom.

LULA AND THE PT IN POWER

It was in his fourth electoral race, in 2002, that Lula won the presidential election, and by this time Brazil was not the same. In 1989, when he was a candidate for the first time, the country was experiencing very intense social and labor struggles. By 2002 the neoliberal wave's dramatic and profound restructuring of production had forced the PT to publish its signature "Letter to the Brazilian People" in an effort to calm the markets. This document declared the PT's acceptance of the most substantive elements of the IMF's prescriptions. In order to have a chance of winning the election, Lula the candidate had to demonstrate that he was adapted to and in complete agreement with the globalized financial world. The real and symbolic impacts of the working-class candidate had to receive the seal of approval of the financial establishment. Instead of a break, capital demanded continuity. The economic policies of the new government did not present any doubts or involve any risks.

Besides preserving (or even expanding) the benefits to financial capital, guaranteeing the primary surplus, preserving the concentrated land ownership structure, establishing a tax on retired workers, and continuing the privatizations in the form of public-private collaborations, the Lula government took much bigger steps. It strongly promoted the participation of the private pension funds both in private social security and in privatization schemes. The aim was to integrate representatives of labor and their union representatives into the financialized capitalist model being assembled. The most visible feature distinguishing Lula's government from that of Cardoso was the expansion of the Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) program (later transformed into the Bolsa Família [Family Basket], which under Cardoso had been called the Bolsa Escola [School Basket] and had reached only a very limited number of beneficiaries).

Although this is not the place to examine the movements and countermovements of the Lula era, there are at least two central issues directly linked to the relationship that was established between the top union leadership and the state: the proposal of labor and union reform and the expansion of the union cenrals' right to receive the union tax. The union sector had expanded considerably during the two Cardoso governments and the first Lula government.

Besides the CUT, the Central dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Brasil (Workers' Central of Brazil—CTB), formed by the Corrente Sindical Classista after the latter left the CUT in 2007, and the Força Sindical there were several small union centrals competing for space. Among them were the Central Geral dos Trabalhadores do Brasil (General Workers' Central of Brazil—CGTB), the União Geral dos Trabalhadores (General Workers' Union—UGT), and the Nova Central (New Central), all of them with a low level of union representation and many of them heirs to the old unionism and very eager for the expansion of state funding. In open opposition to the Lula government (and later also Dilma Rousseff's) two stood out: the Coordenação Nacional de Lutas (National Coordinator of Struggles—CONLUTAS) and Intersindical (Inter-Union), both of which strongly rejected any kind of state support. CONLUTAS championed the organization not only of unions but also of social movements, while Intersindical assumed a more pronounced labor profile, focusing on recovering grassroots unionism, but was clearly divided over whether to create a new union central.

At the end of 2004, a union reform proposal drawn up by the tripartite body called the Fórum Nacional do Trabalho (National Labor Forum) gained momentum. While this proposal was hindered both by the political crisis of the Lula government (the so-called Mensalão) and by the strong opposition of various union sectors (right, center, and left), it did highlight some points that clearly contradicted the principles that had guided the creation of the CUT and the practice of the new unionism. The proposal favored and strengthened the top union leaderships, transferring negotiations to the union centrals and therefore restricting the activities of unions and workplace assemblies. This last point, as we have seen, had been a decisive issue when the CUT was founded. The union centrals were to be required to demonstrate activity in at least 18 states distributed across five regions and in at least seven economic sectors and to represent at least 15 percent of the workers in each sector, thus hampering the organizing efforts of the more autonomous entities once minimum standards for representation were established. Moreover, the collection of the union tax and other workers' financial contributions was to be replaced by the so-called contribution for collective bargaining of up to 1 percent of the worker's net income in the previous year. This directly impeded the autonomous, free, and voluntary commitment of workers to make contributions for the financial support of their unions. It is difficult to imagine that the top-down leadership and bureaucratism ingrained in this proposal for union reform could have earned the endorsement of the original CUT, for which community-based organization, freedom, autonomy, and independence were nonnegotiable principles. Control of important sectors of the new unionism was vital for the Lula government, and in a sense it revived a two-way policy: the union leadership would occupy important positions in the state bureaucracy (in the ministries, on the boards of state and privatized enterprises), and budget allocations would be greatly expanded through the Fundo de Amparo ao Trabalhador (Workers' Aid Fund) and other state funds, thus guaranteeing the support for the government of the principal union centrals. Thus before the end of his second term Lula had both recognized the legality of the union centrals and allowed them to benefit from the union tax. The old rallying cry of the CUT and so many unions—the struggle

for an autonomous mechanism for receiving the financial contributions of their members—became more part of history than part of the present.

Had the new unionism grown old? Was it being enveloped by what it had once viewed so negatively? Was it being reabsorbed by state unionism, with its characteristic conciliatory practice expanded in line with the new times?

CONCLUSION

The different political groups that joined together to create the new unionism strongly emphasized the idea of a break with the past, and this prevented the new unionism from giving proper attention to the difficulties historically experienced by the Brazilian labor movement. Perhaps this is why it ended up reproducing over time practices that it had originally opposed. In establishing a total break with the previous union trajectory, the new unionism saw itself as a beginning. As a result, it denied or undervalued past experiences, and some traditional problems were confronted as if they were new and could be easily resolved by the political will of social actors. Reality, however, proved to be far more complex and recalcitrant. Thus the new unionism, while novel in some respects, had strong elements of continuity. In the process of building its identity, it reinforced its distinctive traits while preserving practices of the past.

Even in the 1980s, despite its many achievements on several levels, the labor movement did not manage to overcome some of its traditional limitations, remaining, for example, incapable of putting down roots inside companies. Thus, despite being highly valued in union discourse, organization by workplace was sparse and scattered. Furthermore, while strikes and mobilizations were very important in easing the impact of spiraling inflation on the lives of workers, they had no generalized effects. Given the heterogeneity of labor categories and their disparities in bargaining power, in a way this restricted the stronger and better-organized categories. Along the same lines, the labor movement was unable to reduce social inequalities, something that would have been of enormous importance.

The new unionism was an update of earlier practices by sectors that, in their time, were identified with progressive positions for advancing workers' struggles. Identifying with the most dynamic sector of this class movement, it made a great contribution toward combating the restrictive policies confronted by the labor movement and expanded the participation of organized workers in the struggle for their demands and intervention in the broader political scene. The working-class movement had in the new unionism an important interpreter and promoter of its demands. At the same time, the new unionism had to confront the difficulties that have historically posed challenges to the working class's political and organizational experience. Overemphasis on its novelty and failure to understand the intensely unfavorable international conjuncture created by the advent of neoliberalism and its restructuring of production, combined with the lack of in-depth understanding of the serious limitations that mark the history of unionism in Brazil, prevented the new unionism from giving those difficulties appropriate attention.

REFERENCES

Almeida, M. H. Tavares de
1975 "O sindicato no Brasil: novos problemas, velhas estruturas." *Debate e Crítica*, no. 6 (July): 49–74.

Alves, Giovanni
2000 *O novo (e precário) mundo do trabalho*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Antunes, Ricardo
1988 *A rebeldia do trabalho*. Campinas: UNICAMP/Ensaio.
1995 *O "novo sindicalismo" no Brasil*. Campinas: Pontes.
2006 *Riqueza e miséria do trabalho no Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
2013 *The Meanings of Work*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Araújo, Angela
1998 *A construção do consentimento: Corporativismo e trabalhadores nos anos trinta*. São Paulo: Scritta.

Cardoso, Adalberto
2003 *A década neoliberal e a crise dos sindicatos no Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Delgado, L. Neves
1986 *O comando geral dos trabalhadores no Brasil, 1961–1964*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Druck, M. G.
1999 *Terceirização: (des)fordizando a fábrica: Um estudo crítico do complexo petroquímico*. São Paulo: Boitempo.

Frederico, Celso
1979 *A vanguarda operária*. São Paulo: Edições Símbolo.
1987 *A esquerda e o movimento operário 1964/1984*. Vol. 1. São Paulo: Novos Rumos.

Galvão, A.
2007 *Neoliberalismo e reforma trabalhista no Brasil*. São Paulo: Ed. Revan/FAPESP.

Giannotti, V. and Sebastiao Neto
1991 *CUT: Ontem e hoje*. Petrópolis: Vozes.

Humphrey, J.
1982 *Fazendo o milagre*. Petrópolis: Vozes/CEBRAP.

Nogueira, Arnaldo
1998 *A modernização conservadora do sindicalismo brasileiro*. São Paulo: Educ/FAPESP.

Ramalho, J. R. and Heloisa Martins (eds.).
1994 *Terceirização: Diversidade e negociação no mundo do trabalho*. São Paulo: Hucitec.

Rodrigues, Iram J.
1997 *Sindicalismo e política: A trajetória da CUT*. São Paulo: Scritta/FAPESP.

Rodrigues, L. M.
1990 *CUT: Os militantes e a ideologia*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Rodrigues, L. M. and Adalberto Cardoso
1993 *Força Sindical: Uma análise sócio-política*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.

Santana, Marco A.
1997 *Political Representation and Trade Unions in Brazil: Ruptures and Continuities*. Working Paper 18. Manchester: International Centre for Labour Studies.
1999 "Entre a ruptura e a continuidade: visões da história do movimento sindical brasileiro." *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais* 41: 103–120.
2001 *Homens partidos: Comunistas e sindicatos no Brasil*. São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro: Unirio/Boitempo.

Santana, Marco A. and Ricardo Antunes
2007 "O PCB, os trabalhadores e o sindicalismo na história recente do Brasil," in M. Ridenti and D. Aarão Reis (eds.), *História do marxismo no Brasil (Partidos e movimentos após os anos 1960)*, vol. 6: 375-410. Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP.

Telles, Jover
1962 *O movimento sindical no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Vitória.

Vianna, Luiz W.
1976 *Liberalismo e sindicato no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.