

## Precarious work and Workers' Resistance: reframing Labour for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

For decades, research on labour collective organisation has focused almost exclusively on formal workers employed in industrial settings or in the public sector, defended by collective bargaining, represented by trade unions within relatively stable industrial relations systems. This view however has failed to take into account the vast 'precarious' workforce, essential to the production and re-production of capital as a whole. This stream focuses on the experiences, relations, and theorization of precarious and informal sector workers.

Women's labour in the sphere of social reproduction, low-waged workers who work outside conventional work as subcontractors in global production chains or in the informal economy of the global cities or as crowd workers in the digital economy, migrant workers whose exploited work often lays at the margin of legality, new groups of dispossessed people forced into the labour market, are categories of workers traditionally excluded and neglected by the labour relations literature. Precarious/informal workers are often considered unproductive, unregulated, and thus unrepresentable. Considering the speed of development and intensity of integration of global capitalist processes and the political turn to neoliberalism, which has brought about new (or refreshed old) paradigms to increase workers' productivity and profits, this stream is devoted to the importance of these 'invisible', precarious workers, today; who represent the majority of workers in the global South and increasingly, the world.

Broadening research on this underworld of precarious, informal, and unrepresented workers is crucial for understanding a fundamental dimension of the process of capital accumulation in the global age. It also helps to address theoretical concerns about the composition of the working class (Bremner 2013, van der Linden 2008, Standing 2011); the role of work and social reproduction (Federici 2012); the practices and nature of workers' informal resistance (Ackroyd and Thompson 2001, Gall et al. 2013, Atzeni 2013, Ness 2014); and, to understand linkages existing between struggles at the level of the workplace and more broadly (Harvey, 2012).

In the past 30 years, one sided views of labour have been explicitly based on the political role assigned to traditional industrial workers. Either from a revolutionary or a reformist perspective, this particular section of the working class was considered central to any transformative politics. The advent of neoliberalism has swept away much of the power of the industrial working class in the global North, leaving a *tabula rasa*, politically and theoretically. From an empirical point of view, diversity, heterogeneity, unevenness, and unpredictability characterise many workers' struggles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Against this theoretical and empirical gap in knowledge, the stream thus aims to theoretically broaden the concept of labour and worker resistance by calling for:

- Papers that offer insights on daily lives, the organisation and resistance of precarious workers, in broad terms, as employed in a range of sectors, geographical and spatial landscapes, economic environments, and regulatory employment regimes.

- Papers that develop knowledge on the connections between different workers' struggles and the specific socio-economic, historical and productive context in which these have developed.
- Papers that engage theoretically and empirically with class and transformative politics.
- Studies on work and women in social reproduction in the feminist/gender tradition.
- Analyses of migrant workers' agency in the most recent labour-geography research.
- Studies on new forms of workers' organisation in the community and the collectivization of precarious workers.
- Global research on work and social mobilization in cities.

The stream organisers are editing a special issue of the journal *Working USA: The Journal of Labor and Society*, to be published in December 2015. We are also exploring the field of labour from a broader perspective in recent publications (as with Atzeni's edited book *Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism* or Ness'edited book *New Forms of Worker Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class Struggle Unionism* and forthcoming: *The New Industrial Proletariat*), and as invited speakers in events recently held at universities and research centres in the UK, The Netherlands, USA, Canada, Australia, India, China, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina.

- **Maurizio Atzeni, Loughborough**, [m.atzeni@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:m.atzeni@lboro.ac.uk)
- **Immanuel Ness, Brooklyn College CUNY**, [manny.ness@gmail.com](mailto:manny.ness@gmail.com)