The Crisis of the Brazilian Labor Movement and the Emergence of Alternative Forms of Working-Class Contention in the 1990s

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Abstract

The article focuses on the effects that neo-liberal economic restructuring of the Brazilian economy and on how this impacted the political consciousness of workers facing rapid changes in their work lives, employment prospects, pervasive neo-liberal discourses from authorities and few opportunities for collective resistance. After a brief examination of the significant decline in collective mobilizations over the decade of the 1990s and a description of how structural changes have undermined the social bases of labor militancy, the article proceeds to analyze how workers’ consciousness have been changed in content. Using a theoretical model of political consciousness developed by the author, the article points to the emergence of a consciousness of demobilization that characterizes the current stance of workers as they face the uncertainties of social changes. Bringing together theoretical contributions from several studies of the psychology of participation, the model presented in this article attempts to conceptually synthesize these contributions in an integrated analytical framework of political consciousness applied to the case of the Brazilian workers under conditions of political demobilization.

Keywords

Collective action, demobilization action, political consciousness

Resumo

O artigo ao enfocar os efeitos da economia neo-liberal na reestruturação da economia brasileira busca entender qual o seu impacto na consciência política dos trabalhadores que estão sob condições de mudanças sociais constantes como o desemprego. Após uma breve consideração sobre o significado do declínio das mobilizações coletivas nas décadas de 1990 e uma descrição de como as mudanças estruturais têm determinado as bases sociais da militância, o artigo segue na análise da conscientização política. Usando um modelo teórico desenvolvido pelo autor sobre a consciência política, o texto aponta para a emergência de uma consciência da desmobilização que caracteriza o estado atual dos trabalhadores. A partir de várias contribuições teóricas de estudos da psicologia política e das ações coletivas, o modelo teórico apresentado apresenta uma síntese destas contribuições através de um modelo de análise integrativo de explicação da consciência política aplicado ao caso dos trabalhadores brasileiros em condições de desmobilização política.

Palavras-chave

Ação coletiva, desmobilização política, consciência política
As the decade of the 1980s drew to a close, the Brazilian labor movement was at its height in mobilization capacity when strike strength was ten times that of the beginning of the decade. Without a doubt by the end of the 1980s, one can confirm that the Brazilian labor movement, especially as represented by the CUT, had reached an historic level of development able to lead strike actions in separate occupational sectors as well as command national general strikes. On the institutional side the CUT represented the consolidation into a national organization of a previously fragmented progressive labor leadership bringing together 89% of the government employees unions, 51% of private national enterprise workers unions and 56% of unions in multinational enterprises(1).

As Graph 1 illustrates, strike activity level in 1990 reflected the tendencies of the previous decade. In this first year of the 1990s organized labor lead 1952 separate strikes with an average of 4654 strikers per event(2). Over the entire decade though, one finds that labor’s trajectory was in fact inverse to the 1980s. Focusing on strike performance as a quantitative measure of labor’s capacity to mobilize one finds that the 1990s can be divided into three distinct phases representing different patterns of labor mobilization.

Illustrated in Graph 1, Phase I encompasses the years of 1990 to 1993 when labor

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2 Dieese, Estatísticas de Greves. Calculations by author.
was struggling against the effects of hyperinflation. These years were marked by severe economic instability because of the hyperinflation spiral and labor’s response was direct against the corrosion of wages due to the 25-30 percent monthly inflation. There was a significant decrease in the number of strike actions from 1,952 in 1990 to 732 in 1993 and rising slightly between 1993 and 1994. Though strike actions significantly decreased, the average number of strikers increased to new record heights. By 1993, the average number of strikers was 7,095 per strike. This means that as hyperinflation drained the lifeblood of the people, an increasing number workers joined in strike actions. Even though one can see in this first phase a fluctuation in average number of strikers it is important to note that in spite of the fluctuation, strikes represented a growing number of participants. The only exception was in 1992 when both strikes and average number of strikers took a downward curve probably as striking was substituted by the political mobilizations over the crisis in the Presidency of Fernando Collor. As unions, labor centrals, student and neighborhood organizations, politicians, church clergy and economic leaders mobilized in favor of impeaching the president, one finds that working-class strike activity slumped both in terms of strike events as well as in average number of strikers. This was not unexpected, since strike behavior has generally receded whenever national political issues reach critical points of mass mobilizations.

Phase 2 comprises the years of 1994, 1995, 1996, the years immediately following the monetary stabilization program of the *Plano Real*. Economic stabilization under the *Plano Real* would prove to be a fundamental factor in undermining labor’s mobilization capacity from time on. Graph 1 indicates strike activity, in terms of number of strikes, increased slightly over the previous period (Phase 1) but average number of strikers declines at a rapid rate reaching the lowest level since the late 1970s. In this respect, the relevance of the Second Phase can only be understood in relation to Phase 1 and Phase 3. In the overview, we find that Phase 2 reflects the difficulties that the labor movement had, and in particular the CUT\(^{(3)}\), in dealing with the new socio-economic conditions created as a consequence of economic stabilization.

The data for Phase 3 depicts strike activity in a period of growing economic recession due to the monetary policies of the Cardoso government in which strike activity continued to decline. Needless to say, the causes for this decline are, in part, the effects of economic recession on workers’ disposition to challenge employers in a period of growing unemployment and economic uncertainty, but as we shall argue in the remainder of this article the decline in labor union mobilization also

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3 CUT - “Central Única dos Trabalhadores”
resulted from the undermining of the CUT’s rank-and-file base as a consequences of stabilization and subsequent neo-liberalization of the Brazilian economy.

The Changing Profile of Strike Demands

Looking at the years between 1994 and 1999, the period of the stabilized economy, there was a decline in strike activity due to changing economic conditions evidenced in the change in the profile of strike demands over the three phases. Strike actions in the first phase (1990-1993) advocated demands predominantly proactive in nature, focusing overwhelmingly on issues of wages. After economic stabilization in 1994, strike demands underwent important changes clearly differentiating the subsequent Phases 2 and 3. As Graph 2 shows, between 1994 and 1997 (Phase 2) proactive strike demands began a gradual decline while defensive demands increased significantly. Coupled with a decline in strike actions, the shift from proactive to defensive demands marks Phase 2 as a transition period from a phase in which hyper-inflation dominated labor’s demands to a period of economic stability in which employers in adjusting to the effects of low inflation economics turned against workers to lower the costs and maintain profit margins. Because of this, workers in distinct situations acted together to resist employers’ encroachments on workers’ gains.

GRAPH 2

PERCENTAGE OF PROACTIVE AND DEFENSIVE STRIKE DEMANDS
BRAZIL, 1994-1999

Source: Adapted from data in 5 Anos do Plano Real, Boletim DIEESE, Separata Julho 1999, Grafico 31, p. 11.
This is exemplified in analyzing specific demands made by strike actions at this time. In Phase 2 wage demands decrease in almost 40% between 1994 and 1996 while demands over employers’ compliance to contract agreements rose from 18% to 44%. During this time, demands over job security remained at the 10% level.

It is in Phase 3 that one finds the most change in the profile of strike demands. Beginning with 1997, as strike actions and worker participation plummet, strike demands reflect the new social-economic conditions of recessive neo-liberal government policies. From 1997 on, defensive demands overwhelmingly dominate workers’ demands while proactive demands become progressively less important.

A closer look at the specific strike demands in this Phase, that higher wage demands play a less important role falling to 25% in 1998 and 28% in 1999. On the other hand reactive demands like contract compliance and job security become predominant among the issues raised in strikes. Contract compliance demands account for 50% of the demands and more interestingly is the fact that job security demands have an important increase from 15% in 1997 to almost 30% in 1999. Not only did stabilization implant low inflation but also created the conditions for fundamental changes in basic structures of the economy.

Why then in the 1990s, with a highly organized union movement under the CUT, has labor been less efficacious in its capacity to mobilize workers against the effects of neo-liberal policies and globalization. While the 1994 Plano Real brought hyper-inflation under control, the Brazilian economy was already showing signs of major changes in its structures. Certainly the impact of an economy in recession as in the years 1997-1999 might explain the major decline in strike activity if it were not for the fact that this decline began at the beginning of the decade after a very successful decade (1980s) of labor militancy and organizing. This article argues that the changes in the economy and in social structures which began in 1990 contributed significantly to a weakening of the CUT’s rank-and-file base and provoked serious dilemmas among union leaders in formulating systematic and cogent union responses to the negative effects of stabilization and neo-liberalization.

Looking at the trajectory of strike activities over the 1980s, strike rate data (Sandoval, 1993:163) show that a few occupational categories stand out as the pillars of labor militancy: metal workers, especially automotive and steel workers; bank workers; and government employees, teachers and health workers.

Examining the evolution of employment between 1989 and 1999 for these occupational categories, one finds that of the occupational categories that had been the mainstay of CUT militancy (metal/automobile workers, bank workers, and civil servants)
only government workers did not suffer significant changes in employment over the decade. Both automotive and metal workers, as well as, bank workers saw job opportunities significantly decrease especially when compared to the overall rates in industrial employment and employment in the service sector (Mattoso, 1999: 29-30).

**Crisis in the Social Bases of the CUT: The Case of the Metal Workers**

Throughout the decade of the 1980s metal workers of the ABC region of São Paulo demonstrated their determination and combativeness by participating in the major mobilizations of and providing the CUT with the core leadership necessary to consolidate that national labor movement. Yet by 1990 employment opportunities in the sector declined. In Phase 1, employment declined less severely from 95 to 78 percent. After 1994, though, work in the sector continued to decline throughout Phase 2. More recently between 1997-1999, employment for automotive workers had reached an historic low of about 58%, having lost since 1990 a little less that half of the jobs in the sector.

Without a doubt, job loss in the sector can be attributed to factors related to changes in the technological bases of production and to the effects of recession imposed by the Cardoso government in order to guarantee currency stability and his re-election. But metal workers unions faced other challenges that they have had little success in overcoming.

With the Plano Real’s stabilization of inflation, foreign investment once again increased, many automotive and metal manufactures sought sites outside the traditional industrial metropolitan regions of São Paulo, Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro to build new industrial plants and assembly units.

Consequently, the cities that had been the cradle and stronghold of the ‘new unionism’ now face growing unemployment not only due to technological changes and recession but, just as importantly, due to the flight of industrial investment to other regions of the country. As authorities from less industrialized cities and states used direct fiscal incentives to attract the new industrial investments, the older industrial centers have suffered a gradual process of de-industrialization as in the case of the automotive and metal works centers of metropolitan São Paulo and Belo Horizonte.

In a recent study of the evolution of industrial employment between large and small cities (Silva, 1999:B1), the authors point out the shift in both the number of jobs going from the larger cities to smaller ones but also a shift in the bulk of wages that accompany these changes. In 1970, large cities accounted for 70% of the jobs. By 1998, small cities had succeeded in attracting 52.6% of the jobs and large cities were left with only 47.4%.
Between 1991 and 1998, the city of São Paulo lost 474 metal industries that moved either to the interior of the state or to some other state. This represented a loss of over 25,000 jobs in this sector alone. While in 1993 the metallurgical industries employed 32.6% of the labor force in the city, by 1996 this had been reduced to only 21%. Yet average wages in São Paulo were around R$1200 while in the interior average wages in the metal industries were approximately R$840.6

This decline of industrial employment in the large cities is also reflected in this shift in wages from the capitals to the interior. In 1970 large cities accounted for 82.9 of the wages paid in the industrial sector and the small cities only 17.1%. By 1998 there had been a noticeable change in that large cities now account for 64.3% and small cities have increased their share to 35.7%: doubling their share of industrial wages in the last 30 years.

The relocation of pre-existing industries and installation of new ones to other regions away from the traditional industrial areas not only created immediate problems for the local unions of unemployment and dislocation of their workers, but also on the national level the CUT was confronted with competing union interests. On the one hand, mainstay unions in the older industrial regions faced fleeing investments while on the other hand these ‘new’ industrial parks with their weaker and less experienced unions and their working populations were strong lobbies against the continued industrial concentration in the Sao Paulo-Belo Horizonte-Rio de Janeiro triangle.

The fact that many local populations, municipalities and state governments mobilized their resources through tax incentives, tax exemptions, low interest public loans, etc in order to attract industry away from the traditional industrial centers has placed the CUT in a delicate position between its traditional union base and the unions in these emerging industrializing cities outside the metropolitan areas. This dilemma has meant that the CUT has been less able to formulate a coherent and cogent position with regard to this recent form of industrial expansion.

The flight of industrial capital from the large metropolitan areas has leveled a serious blow to the capacity of core metal workers unions to respond to the multiple forces that stabilization and neo-liberalization brought upon their rank-and-file. Facing shrinking job markets and de-industrialization in traditionally strong union areas, the metal workers unions were confronted with yet another challenge: the privatization of the Brazilian steel industry, since steel workers unions made up another militant arm of the labor movement over the 1980s.

Beginning with the ill-fated Fernando Collor presidency and continued with the more determined Cardoso presidency, the dominant political elites assumed the commitment of privatizing the extensive industrial and banking holdings under
government ownership. In terms of labor militancy, key in this broad public sector were the workers of Brazilian steel industry and the state-owned banks.

The debates within the CUT over the privatization issue brought to a head the political dilemma faced by the progressive unionists with regard to the situation of the state-owned enterprises: on the one hand these enterprises were economically deficient due to excessive political patronage which resulted in mismanagement, featherbedding practices and lack of market competitiveness and, on the other hand, they represented a strategic sector for the national economy. As the debates developed it became clear that CUT’s leadership and their political supporters, though positioned against privatization, were unprepared to offer viable alternatives to the distortions afflicting the state-owned enterprises, while on the other hand, local union leaders and steel worker rank-and-file were more favorable to privatization in seeing it as the only form of correcting these distortions and ultimately curtailing political patronage. As each steel complex was auctioned off, local unions leaders and their workers confronted CUT and student activists on the streets protesting in favor or against privatization. In the aftermath of the confrontations in each privatized company, the union locals voted to leave the CUT, though remaining independent unions, instead of joining the more conservative labor confederation, Força Sindical. Between 1991 and 1997 ten Brazilian steel complexes were privatized bring nearly six billion dollars to the national treasury.

The loss of the steel rank-and-file to the CUT coupled with the growing problems facing the metal workers unions and rank-and-file in the older industrial has meant that one traditional stronghold of labor militancy is seriously curtailed.

**Crises in the Social Bases of the CUT: The Case of the Bank Workers**

Like the metal workers, bank workers also faced changes that sapped the capacity of the union leadership to mobilize their workers. In the first place, bank workers faced massive unemployment after economic stabilization. The demands on the banking system as a result of hyperinflation made it necessary for banks to provide customer services on a massive scale as well as guarantee that money transactions be conducted as swiftly as possible given the high daily devaluation rates due to inflation. Because of this, all banks, up until the 1994 Plano Real, maintained a large contingency of workers as tellers and in the processing functions to guarantee rapid transactions under the pressures brought about from the very high inflation. Banks quickly adapted themselves to computerized procedures that made transactions more rapid, while costumer services remained highly labor intensive prior to 1994. Between 1990 and 1994 (Phase 1) employment in the banking sector already was indicating a strong decline from almost 100 in 1990 to 77 in 1994.
Certainly the bulk of the jobs lost in this period were due to the growing computerization of the banking system. By 1994 banks had already established the infrastructure for an expansion of computerized banking. One finds a growing tendency both in the doubling of the number of ATM units installed in Phase 1 and in terms of the increase in automatic transactions that grew dramatically over the period. As banks automated their systems worker employment took a corresponding downward turn in this period. After 1994 under a stabilized economy, the tendency in bank automation climbed as indicated in the number of transactions carried on via automation as financial institutions added to an expanding ATM system another facility: the home office banking services.

This is reflected in Phase 2 and Phase 3 in the direct decline in bank employment shown in which employment in 1999 reach almost 50% of what it was in 1990. Needless to say, the massive dismissal of bank workers over the decade severely weakened the unions’ capacity to mobilize workers as the rank-and-file became less predisposed to risk their jobs in work stoppages.

Furthermore, unions were slow to realize that computerization of the banking system during the hyper inflation years was a prelude to further automation once economic stability occurred. By the time these effects of stabilization were recognized by the union leadership as a clear danger, banks had already laid the groundwork for one of the most sophisticated banking systems in the world.

In addition to the shocks coming from technological changes in the banking system, unions were also confronted with the dilemmas of privatization of the state-owned banks. Since state-bank employees had been a backbone of labor militancy, bank workers’ unions were hard pressed to maintain their influence on employees as public banks were sold off to private owners and traditional labor relations in these banks changed drastically.

Through the decade over 90% of the state-owned banks were privatized and consequently was a major blow to the unions’ mobilization capacity. Unlike the metal workers, state bank employees, in conjunction with their union leaders, strongly resisted privatization but to no avail.

A fourth factor which impacted the mobilization capacity of the bank workers’ unions was the series of financial crises which hit a number of large national banks after the end of hyper-inflation. The closing of these important private financial institutions in conjunction with the entering into the Brazilian market of foreign banking interests further fueled the tendency toward greater concentration of the banking system as these new foreign banks purchased both state-owned and privately owned banks. The concentration of the industry has strengthened bank employers in relation to the now more vulnerable rank-and-file, often leaving union
leaders in disarray and lacking cogent proposals.

It was primarily these changes that are reflected in the pronounced decline over the decade of employment opportunities in the banking sector. Confronted with a multiplicity of issues resulting from the major re-structuring of the banking sector, the labor unions have been unable to formulate coherent political strategies to defend the interests of their workers either with regards to job security or the effects of high-technological innovation. As a result, bank workers’ leaders, though continuing to have a major role in national and regional union politics, have been less successful in mobilizing their category and have regularly faced defeat at the hands of government authorities and employers.

**Crises in the Social Bases of the CUT: The Case of the Government Workers**

Of the occupational groups within the CUT that demonstrated the most militancy through their propensity to strike, the government employees stand out as having in the 1980s the highest strike rates in the country. Growing in organization and militancy over the decade by 1988 civil servants accounted for almost half of the strikes. By 1989, in terms of man-hours lost (Almeida, 1994:94), workers mobilized and strike frequency, the government employees far out paced the private sector workers in strike activities by almost 15 times (Sandoval, 1993:164-9).

In union politics civil service unions acquired a key position within the CUT occupying national and regional director’s positions often disproportionate to their numbers in the work force or even in the rank-and-file affiliated to CUT unions. In 1995, of the 25 members of the national board of the CUT, 18 were representatives of public sector unions and only seven from the private sector. In the same year in several state boards, civil service union representatives held an important proportion of the seats (Nogueira, 1999:59-66). Within the government employee unionism, some occupational categories stood out in their militancy and influence in union politics: education workers, health workers and government employees in the public enterprises especially bank workers, steel workers and petroleum workers.

In analyzing the effects of the changes of the 1990s one finds that public service workers were not immune to the economic effects of the post-Plano Real period. Firstly, one segment of government employee unions, the bank workers and steel workers, were severely curtailed in their capacity to exercise collective pressure due to the impact of privatization of the public banks and the state-owned steel complexes.

Secondly, government workers were very hard hit by the fiscal crisis of the State. As
stabilization brought out the consequences of deficit spending, authorities were forced to limit expenditures especially in terms of wage increases for its employees. Since 1994 neither the federal, state or municipal governments have had the conditions to give wage increases. Even though this has caused considerable discontent among government employees, frequent demonstrations of the fiscal crisis have made civil servants less predisposed to make proactive demands. In an absolute inversion to the high strike rates of the 1980’s, in this decade civil servants have been conspicuously absent from the strike rolls. The predominant among the collective mobilization have been strikes protesting the failure of either state or municipal governments’ meet their monthly rolls or to protest the critical deterioration of working conditions, especially in the fields of education and health. Only a few privileged sectors, like the subway workers union of São Paulo, have struck for wage increases.

A third factor which contributes to the demobilization of the public service workers is the effects of decentralization of some key government services like public health, basic education and social welfare. Among the main points on the political agenda of the Cardoso Presidency has been the decentralization from federal and state governments to the municipal governments of these three service areas. As municipalization has progressed by obliging local authorities to assume more of the direct administration of these services, unions faced the difficult challenge of restructuring themselves for action on the local city level even though they were organized to act on the state or national levels. Education, health and welfare workers’ unions were not prepared to handle the effects of the shift of the locus of decision-making from the state secretariats or federal ministries to municipal authorities. Both the logic of organization and recruitment and the strategies of mobilization were clearly distinct depending on whether the struggle was against a single state or federal authority or a multiplicity of local authorities. This dispersion of government decision-making resulting from decentralization has meant that unions and their leaders have been hard pressed to achieve an effective restructuring of their unions to conform to the new geography of public administration.

Traditionally, the public service workers unions have been least successful in organizing and mobilizing municipal workers compared to state and federal employees. In the 1980s municipal workers were less strike prone accounting for the least number of actions and the lowest levels of worker participation and duration than either federal or state employees’ strikes (Sandoval, 1993:167-9).

Finally, government employee unions have faced growing disfavor among public opinion, including workers from the private sector, who consider civil servants a privileged category of workers. A 1995 poll in Sao Paulo indicated that 66.4% of those interviewed felt that they were either very much or partially hurt by public
employee strikes. At the same time, 84.3% felt that employees of the state enterprises were privileged workers. Even though 63.7% of those interviewed felt that the real objective of civil servant strikes was politically motivated one finds that the interviewees believed, in 79.3%, that government employees in essential services had the right to strike over economic issues while at the same time 56.3% were against political strikes. Thus, confronted with a lack of support among the general public, including workers in the private, the various types of protests that government employee unions have moved in this period have been conducted without any significant support from the rank-and-file workers of the private sector. Quite to the contrary, even though civil service unions occupy a significant number of seats in the upper echelons of the CUT, they have been unable to mobilize significant collective support from among workers unions in the private sector.

Changes in the Political Consciousness of Workers

In light of the combined effects of economic changes, globalization and government’s concerted attacks on working-class entitlements, one of the consequences was to undermine the sentiments of working-class consciousness so laboriously constructed in the mobilizations of the 1980s.

The changes that have occurred in the political awareness of workers are fundamental in understanding the social psychological aspects of labor’s demobilization in the 1990s. In order to briefly examine these changes in workers consciousness resulting from the neo-liberalization of Brazilian society we have chosen to work with the model of political consciousness illustrated in the Figure 1.

This model of political consciousness depicts the various social psychological dimensions that constitute an individual’s political awareness of society and himself/herself as a member of that society and consequently represents his/her disposition to action in accordance with that awareness. By political consciousness we understand a composite of interrelated social psychological dimensions of meanings and information that allow individuals to make decisions as to the best course of action within political contexts and specific situations.

As the Figure 1 illustrates, our model of political consciousness is a multi-faceted construct consisting of seven analytically distinguishable dimensions that together come to form that set of representations that direct a person’s involve in his society as a political actor. These seven dimensions are: collective identity, societal beliefs and expectations, sentiments of collective interests and adversaries, political efficacy, sentiments of injustice, willingness to act collectively, and persuasive action proposals. An examination of the contents of these dimensions offer insights as to
Collective Identity

The first dimension consists of a person’s feelings of belongingness or identification with one or more social groups and social categories (Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Jenkins, 1996; Melucci, 1996; Tajfel, 1985; Gamson, 1992). This we had chosen to call a person’s sentiment of collective identity. Several authors have pointed out the importance of group identification processes as an underpinning to one’s commitment to participate in politics. Since the 1950’s research in political psychology established the importance of party partisan identification in contributing to explaining voting behavior and in the case of Brazil the extensive research conducted by Leoncio Camino has shown that even in less stable party systems like Brazil, partisan identification continues to play a key role in determining electoral behavior (Camino 1995; 1998; Gouveia, 1997). In the area of social movement theory, scholars have gradually come to understand that identification processes also play a key role in determining social movement participation (Stryker, Owens & White, 2000;
Hardin, 1995). While sociologists studying social movements have recognized a need for some psycho-sociological component in the interpretation of collective action participation, most continue to work with rudimentary models of political awareness lacking the analytical richness which social psychological research unearthed. Prevalent in the social movement literature in the United States and Europe, with very few exceptions, are the conventional use of the notion of identity as an catch-all term for everything from sentiments of belongingness to ideological persuasions on the individual level and indiscriminately using identity as a collective attribute of a social movement.

Thus in the indiscriminant use of the term identity by these scholars (Snow & McAdam, 2000) the specificities of the sentiment of belongingness loses its analytical power as it becomes virtually synonymous to either the collective representation that participants make of the movement or else the public image that movement leaders deliberately forge for visibility purposes. Consequently this misuse of the identity term has meant a loss not only of the theoretical and analytical contribution of the concept but also has served to obscure the differences and the importance of the interrelations between individuals' identifications with collective actors such as social movements, the collective representations that groups construct about movements and the public images of a social movement made by their leaders.

For this reason, we have chosen to understand collective identity in its more restricted sense as that dimension of political consciousness which refers to the way individuals establish a psychological identification of interests and sentiments of solidarity and belongingness to a collective actor.

**Societal Beliefs, Values and Expectations**

Another dimension in our model of political consciousness consists of the **beliefs, values and expectations** that an individual develops with respect to his/her society and which expresses more explicitly notions of political ideology in the individuals’ world views. These societal evaluations can be understood as social representations about the nature, the structure, the practices and finalities of the social relations that constitute the society in which one lives. They range from the meanings that people give to the social structure and institutions and their insertion in them in terms of the political relations between the social categories and the intentions of the people that comprise those social categories. Though these representations about society are individually held, they are the product of social interactions and experiences which individuals have with the various groups, institutions and contexts in ‘living a society’. A major consequence of ‘living a society’ is the development of sentiments of belonging and not
belonging, inclusion and exclusion, to the social categories and groups that contribute to the structuring of social life.

**Antagonistic Interests and Adversaries**

A third dimension of political consciousness consists of an individual’s sentiments with regard to how one's symbolic and material interests are opposed to the interests of other groups and the extent to which antagonistic interests lead to the conception of the existence of collective adversaries in society. A key to a political consciousness that supports collective action is the feeling of an adversarial relation between oneself and another group or social category. Without the notion of a visible adversary, it is impossible to mobilize individuals into collection and coordinated actions against a specific target whether this target is an individual, a group or an institution.

**Political Efficacy**

Closely related to this adversary element is the fourth dimension of political consciousness that is an individual’s sentiment of political efficacy. By political efficacy we understand a person’s feelings about his/her capacity to intervene in a political situation. Attribution theory (Hewstone, 1989) has taught us that persons can place their interpretation of causation and the causes of things that happen to them in one of three locus: events can be the result of transcendent forces such as historical tendencies, natural disasters, or even divine intervention. For individuals that localize social causation on these types of forces the feeling of efficacy is generally low in as much as they believe that there is little to be gained from their actions en face of transcending nature forces. Often these types of interpretations of causation lead to conformist and submissive reactions to situations of social distress.

Another locus of social causation can be the individual him/herself. In this case, the person believes that social causation if the result of one’s own determination and capacity to deal with a specific situation. In this case, persons seek individual solutions to social situations. In the cases of social conflict or distress, localizing causation in the actions or capabilities of the individual, persons either seek lone approaches to solutions or resort to self-blame for lacking the abilities or fore-sight to deal with social distress. A third interpretation of social causation can be one that localizes causal forces in the actions of other individuals and/or groups. This belief that distressful situations are the result of the actions of certain individuals and/or groups allows persons to also believe that their actions, whether
taken individually or collectively, will have an effect on changing their situation in as much as this form of placing causation permits persons to feel that they can effect change through their actions against the authors of the distressful situation. It is through this third interpretation of causation that one finds that individuals are enabled to become purposeful actors in changing their lives.

**Sentiments of Justice and Injustice**

A fifth dimension of our model of political consciousness is the person’s sentiments of justice and injustice. By this we mean how an individual comes to view any social arrangement in terms of whether that arrangement represents the level of social reciprocity between the actors that the individual would consider as just. Social justice is the expression of the sentiment of reciprocity between obligations and rewards (Moore, 1978). Whenever individuals come to believe that the balance in reciprocal relations has turned against them, they come to understand this break in reciprocity in terms of injustice. What constitutes a balanced relationship of reciprocity and how individuals become aware that reciprocity may have been violated are undoubtedly complex socio-historical processes. Certainly a large part of the criteria to measure notions of reciprocity and subsequently feelings of injustice are historically and contextually determined. Nevertheless, these sentiments that reciprocity has somehow ceased to exist or has been violated and that this constitutes an unjust situation has long been present in collective discontent and subsequent manifestations of protest. It is now commonplace to note that all social movements vindication against an unjust state of affairs. Consequently in looking at what people say about their participation in social movements one always finds embedded in their representations references to notions of injustice as a way of legitimizing their claims and blaming an adversary.

**Willingness to Act Collectively**

The sixth dimension of political consciousness is the willingness to act collectively which refers to a more instrumental dimension of an individual’s predisposition to undertake a set of collective actions as a way of seeking redress to injustices committed against him/her (Klandermans, 1992). This dimension focuses on three aspects of situations that condition of collective participation: one refers to the costs and benefits to interpersonal loyalties and ties resulting from participating or not in the movement; a second one refers to the perceived gains or loses of material benefits
resulting from involvement in the social movement; the third refers to the perceived physical risks in engaging in collective actions given the situational conditions; and lastly is the individual’s evaluation of the social movement organization’s capacity to implement proposed collective actions.

While this dimension, as well as the following dimension, is a very modified take-off from some rational choice theorists’ contribution to the debates on the determinants of collective participation (Olson, 1965) it is undeniable that persons in deciding, individually and collectively, to participate in social movements make informed and meaningful choices that influence their participation and their commitment to the social movement. We understand that these choices are informed and become meaningful for individuals through: their collective identifications; their societal beliefs, values and expectations about society; their sentiments of political efficacy, their perceptions of self-interests and the adversaries they face; and, lastly, their feelings of justice/injustice. Together these dimensions contribute to the individuals’ decision-making of, what we have here termed, the informed and meaningful choices in the evaluation of social movement’s organization, its goals and strategies, and what are perceived as relevant forms of collective actions within given situational constraints.

Social Movement’s Goals and Action

This dimension refers to the degree to which participants perceive a correspondence between the social movement’s goals, its action strategies and their feelings of injustice, their interests and sentiments of political efficacy. Simply put, this dimension focuses on the extent to which participants feel that the goals and proposals of the social movement and its leadership match their own material and symbolic interests, address their claim for justice against the perceived adversary and find that the collective actions proposed are within the scope of their own feelings of political efficacy at a given time. The complex task of matching movement goals and strategies to the aspirations and self-perceived capacities of the movement’s followers has often posed serious challenges to both leaders and rank-and-file members alike. This dimension brings together the other components of political consciousness as they interact with perceived movement organization characteristics in forming a social psychological predisposition to action collectively.

In looking back at the processes of large structural changes in Brazilian society as a result of neo-liberal policies on the part of both government and the private sector, the impact that this has had on the labor movement is evident as indicated by the declining levels of contention. From a political psychology perspective neo-liber-
alization has brought about a significant change in the political consciousness of the working-class. Using the political consciousness model presented above, we can analyze how profound the impact on workers’ views has been and have illustrated this in Figure 2 below.

After the 1980’s when the labor movement succeeded in forging a strong collective working-class identity reflected in increased strike actions, by the end of the 1990’s one finds that workers’ collective identity has been fragmented in several ways. Firstly, changes in the production processes have allowed employers and government to induce identity differenciation by emphasizing the advantage differences between workers in terms of their skill and educational qualifications. Furthermore, as new investments bypass the São Paulo/ABC, Belo Horizonte and Rio de Janeiro industrial centers to new industrial parks, identity differenciation has also occurred within the same occupational categories as workers from one region oppose workers of other regions over the destination of new industrial units. Similarly, as industries tercerize some facets of the production process, workers’ identities once again have been differenciated as one occupational group confronts another occupational group, for example, as
self-employed workers compete against the employed industrial worker. In addition, over the decade, workers’ collective identity has also been fragmented as private sector workers gradually have come to view government workers as economically privileged and many times undeserving of the guarantees that state employ offers the few.

Yet another form of fragmentation of the working-class identity has been the increasing differentiation that is made between the fortunate worker who has been spared the plight of job loss as opposed to the many who have been placed outside the job market by the changes in the economy and/or technological innovation. Since union have traditionally regarded unemployed workers as not being within the scope of their concern, this dichotomy has come to generally undermine the sentiments of a more consistently collective class identity. Finally, workers’ collective identity has suffered from the constant clash between political factions within the labor movement both in terms of the competition between the two national labor organizations, the CUT and Força Sindical, and the conflicts between factions within these national organizations.

Consequently, from a collective identity perspective, one finds that there is ample reason to believe that workers’ sentiments of belonging to a single social category have been weakened for the time being. Simultaneously, workers have come to alter their beliefs and expectations about society and social relations as government, business and the mass media underscore the promise of economic stability and the potential for growth if Brazilians adapt to the demands of the new economic reality. Thus workers gravitate to more individualistically grounded beliefs and expectations while leaving on a secondary plan their more collectivist beliefs that predominated in previous modes of working-class consciousness.

As collective identity fragments and societal beliefs become more individualistic likewise workers’ feelings about collective interests become more ambiguous and unsure. Instead of viewing their interests as collective and adversarial in relation to employers and government, during this decade the complexity of the challenges facing the working class and the inability of the unions to respond to them have made the perception of workers’ interests become more vague favoring a multifaceted vision as they challenge employers but paradoxically as they also oppose other workers whom they feel compete against them because of differences in qualification, occupational field, regional interests or employment opportunities. This breakdown in consensus over workers’ interests as claims directed against an homogeneous adversary, the capitalists and their government allies, has made it difficult for workers to direct their discontent against a well defined target as was the case in the 1980s. This has been further accentu-
ated as both employers and government disclaim any responsibility and blame external ‘historical forces’ of globalization and neo-liberalization as the cause of workers’ troubles.

In so doing, many workers have come to believe that the locus of causation for the consequences of economic restructuring is to be found in those international waves of neo-liberalism and globalization and therefore transcending their capacity to collectively resist what is seemingly inevitable. Because of this workers’ feelings of political efficacy have been shaken as they either come to believe that neo-liberalization and globalization are unavoidable historical processes and/or that their plight is the result their own failure to prepare themselves for the demands of these new times by not having taken advantage of scarce educational opportunities in previous years. In either case, workers come to attribute the causes for today’s troubles and uncertainties to remote processes beyond their control and/or on their inadequacies.

This has lead to feelings of suffering (Dejours, 1999) and discontent without a clearly defined sentiment of injustice. Denied the certainties of class relations that the experiences of the 1980s gave them, induced to condone injustice and separate social and economic interests from political adversity, today Brazilian workers find that the parameters of solidarity are unclear, the options for collective resistance apparently ineffective and the social movements and union organizations which provided their leader and strategies in the past are now wanting and often in a state of disarray while tacitly accepting the interpretations for the current state of affairs as being the result of “historical or global” forces which transcend them. In the absence of proposals for viable collective alternatives, workers have opted to seek individual and/or group solutions to protect themselves from the threats from economic change. As short term union solutions give way to the onslaught of invigorated and deliberate capitalists’ strategies to open markets, weaken unions and reduced entitlements, one finds a striking passivity among a working class that only a few years ago promised to become Latin America’s modern labor movement. This collective passivity in the face of the seemingly lack of collective alternatives reflects profound changes in the political consciousness of Brazilian workers.
Referências Bibliográficas


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