

# Trade unions: social economy and social movements

KATARSIS 1.1

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Work in progress – please do not quote without permission.

# Caveats

- Understanding of trade union varies
  - Political – membership based – legal protection
- Understanding of social economy varies
  - Workers controlled cooperatives – social values through enterprise – individualised entrepreneurship
- Generalisations re-contextualised in research practise

# Historical repertoire

- Historically TUs developed range of responses
  - Collective bargaining
  - Collective self help – pensions, welfare, training
  - Social lobbying - Political and legal initiatives
  - Direct action – syndicalism, worker cooperatives
  - Social awareness – opposition to discrimination
  - Mass action

# Post 1945 – incorporation?

- Social democratic settlement
  - Collective bargaining
  - Corporatism
- Trade unions reflect capitalism – don't challenge it – Anderson
- 'Structured to represent worker interests, or some of them, within the capitalist system'  
Benello in Lindenfeld

# Work relationship - complex

- Employment relationship dynamic
  - Economic exchange – asymmetrical power and authority – open ended – but interdependent – Blyton & Turnball
- Workers disposable and dependable – Hyman
- TUs rooted in employment contract
- But remain largest organisation of workers

# New challenges – 1970s on

- Corporate consensus challenged
  - State capitals challenged
  - International economic crisis
  - Internal funding welfare state contradictions
  - Globalisation intensifies
- Emergence of new social movements
- TUs retreat into bureaucratic mode – nationally and internationally

# Limits to TU response

- Renewal of historical repertoires by others
- TUs respond easier when overlap with work
  - Low pay – discrimination – unemployment – sweat shops
- Less easy when don't
  - Global warming – nuclear power and weapons – party affiliation

# Social economy challenge

- Cooperatives and social enterprise = privatisation, especially public sector TUs
- Challenge of 1/3 analysis of economy
- Voluntary workers and trained dilutees
- Cooperatives failure and degeneration
- Worker control challenges contract
- Divisive of solidarity



# Answers and research

- Document experience
  - Tower
  - Credit union Cardiff
  - ISTC – community union
  - Cleaners min wage campaign
  - Quebec solidarity funds
  - World social forum
  - CUT Central TU Confed in Brazil

# Sites of analysis

- Outside in
- Inside out
- TU leadership – national and international policy
  - Aid or hinder context?
- Local rank and file activity
  - Can global issue relate to members local interest?

# Research issues

- Conceptual – new social movement space and TU mobilisation?
- Relevance of ‘global civil society’ and ‘global social justice and solidarity’? Waterman
- Relevant issues – work, solidarity, the commons, welfare, internationalism, utopia?
- Links with practical demands – diversity or transitional?
- Role of new dialogue through ICT?
- Trajectories and tensions within trade unions?