
David O'Connell

Global Labour University Conference
New Delhi
2017

Proposal / Abstract

Abstract

This paper will seek to address the strategic options that organised labour has in response to the rising tide of neo-nationalism within the European Union. To be concise, the objective is to set out the basis for future policy development which imagines the trade union movement as an engine of transformation of workplace relations on the microeconomic level and socio-economic relations on the macro level (Wolff, 2011) (Alperovitz, 2005). rather than as a functionary component of social-democratic economic strategy. It will also explore the potential effect this strategic approach will have on public attitudes toward union and whether this has the potential to build a coherent strategy against neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism simultaneously.

This will be achieved through extensive surveys of both unionised and non unionised workers in the UK, with a series of questions designed to establish what they think the role of the union movement both is, and should ideally be, in an attempt to isolate whether a transformative view of the workplace would appeal to lay members and the wider working class beyond the activist base of some unions. The research methodology will therefore be Quantitative.

This may need to be reduced to a specific industry due to time constraints but also to avoid false comparisons.

The primary questions taken up by this research topic will be;

- Are union-coop strategies¹ generalisable?
- Would a cooperative strategy aimed at transformation of industrial relations on the microeconomic level reverse union decline in the global north and south?

The core hypotheses will be:

- If unions adopted a transformative vision both in terms of strategy and presentation, they would increase their membership
- That such a view would change public discourse and sap support for neo-nationalism

While this is to be a largely a UK-specific research piece, it is hoped that the data collected will provide the basis for later comparative studies between both ‘most similar’ and ‘most different’ cross country comparisons.

¹ Such as the Self Employed Women's Association

References

- Alperovitz, G. 2005. *America beyond capitalism*. Hoboken, N.J.: J. Wiley.
- Wolff, R. (2012). *Democracy at work*. Haymarket Books, p.177.