

POLITICAL ACTION OF THE BRAZILIAN LABOR MOVEMENT: ISSUES AND CONTRADICTIONS FACING THE PT GOVERNMENTS

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Introduction

The rise of the Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* - PT) in the Brazilian federal government in 2003 had a major impact on the Brazilian labor movement, leading to its reconfiguration (Galvão, 2006). The largest and most important Brazilian union federation, CUT, went through a splitting process. New organizations were created, others merged. However, this reconfiguration is not only expressed in the organizational aspect. It has had a deeper dimension, which concerns the relationship between the union movement and the PT governments.

As it is known, the Brazilian union movement contributed, along with other social movements, to the foundation of PT in 1980, and since then, it has close relations with this party. Unions played an important role in Lula's victory in the 2002 elections and gained political prominence in the PT government, which can be observed by the incorporation of union members to different positions of the federal administration (D'Araujo, 2009)², by their participation in the tripartite bodies created by the government³, and by the adoption of some government measures.

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² As we should comment below, important leaders of the Unique Workers' Central (CUT) were nominated ministers of Lula and Dilma's governments and elected to the Executive branch (in state or municipal levels) or to the Parliament. In addition to participating in the government, the union members also act in the management of the three largest Brazilian pension funds of the government-owned corporation Bank of Brazil (Previ), Petrobras (Petros) and Caixa Economica Federal (Funcef). This participation "has always been high and increased significantly since the start of the Lula's presidency" (D'Araujo, 2009, p. 76).

³ Especially the National Labor Forum (FNT) and the Council for Economic and Social Development (CESD) which we shall discuss later.

The intensification of the union participation in administrative bodies allows us to mention an increased influence of the labor movement in politics; however, it does not mean that the labor movement has conducted governmental "agenda". This agenda follows its very dynamics, which is due both to the wide parties coalition that supports the PT governments – including the center and right-wing parties, such as PL/PR, which occupied the vice-presidency in Lula's governments, and PMDB, which holds the vice presidency in Dilma's governments, – as the composition of the Parliament and the mechanisms governing the relationship between the Legislative and Executive. Therefore, the formulation capacity of the union contrasts with a limited intervention in the decision making process because a minority part of the union propositions is effectively discussed in institutional spaces provided by the government and a part even smaller is implemented⁴.

How to explain this low ability to influence (Araújo and Vêras de Oliveira, 2011) on a government considered pejoratively by the media– especially under the two Lula's governments due to the closer president proximity with the union movement – as a "labor-union republic"?

To answer this question and at the same time to deal with the Brazilian labor movement political action, we discussed, in the first section of this article, how the relationship between unions and politics works in Brazil. In the second section we identify some union participation channels in the government bodies. In the third part we present the main union movement proposals and its acceptance regarding employers and government, following some proposed laws examined by the National Congress. Lastly, in the final section, we point out the conceptions heterogeneity and unions' practices and indicate some sources of conflict between the minority and the hegemonic labor movement.

⁴These difficulties are recognized by the union leaders: "In the National Congress, in turn, the workers' agenda has a hard time advancing, even with intense mobilization periods. The countryside parliamentary front, for example, tries to hamper any democratic progress. The House of Representatives and the Senate formation shows a large majority linked to businessmen, landowners, financial capital and corporations, and a minority linked to social movements and workers, which ultimately conducts the dynamic and voting priorities in both houses" (Henrique, 2013, p. 306).

1. Labor movement and politics: dimensions of a relationship

Labor movement is a political agent that interferes in politics and is affected by it (Mouriaux, 1985, 2006; Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2010). This formulation allows us to understand the unions as both economic and political agents, and that the "relationship between these two roles is complex and contradictory, and the priority assigned to each varies across countries and over time" (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick, 2010, p. 19).

Therefore, unions, whether they like or not, are "inevitably political" (Taylor, 1989, p. 18), even if having no power or adopting a defensive posture. This is not, however, a consensual thesis in the literature. The labor movement transformation along with the crisis of the communist, social democratic and reformist projects, leads not only to unions distance in relation to politics, but also to politics disqualification, because politics is not always considered as a legitimate domain of union action. In the absence of organic or cooperation relationships between unions and parties, the boundaries between unions and politics are reinforced, thus restricting union tasks to the economic or professional field.

Politics does not mean exclusively partisan politics, although the parties are one of its components. The unions political and ideological conceptions make them closer or further from social movements, prioritizing certain claims and forms of struggle, circumscribing their work to union field properly or expanding them toward the political field and the "social movements space" (Mathieu, 2007; Yon, 2012).

The relationship between the union movement and politics comprises different aspects, which can be roughly summarized as follows:

1. Internal labor movement relations, that is, its organizational structure, democracy conception, ideology, program of action and forms of struggle;

2. Its external relations, either with other unions and other social movements, either with employers' organizations, government agencies, political parties etc. The left-wing in power has an interesting element to analyze this relationship, since there is an important tradition of cooperation or alliances between unions and left-wing parties, which would have driven the labor movement institutionalization.

The Brazilian case is particularly intriguing to reflect on the relationship between union movement with parties and government. On the one hand, a left-wing party ascending to power and, on the other hand, the union movement majority support to PT governments stimulate different analyzes⁵.

Creating new unions⁶ can also be seen in the light of their relations with parties and government. Unlike other countries, union politicization in Brazil means, generally, in partisanship (Antoine, 2013). Although the party leadership engagement and the Brazilian union organization is sometimes hidden by a partisan neutrality speech, it is generally explicit. Even though Brazilian law prohibits financial contributions from unions to parties and candidates for elections, and although some unions considered themselves as "apolitical and nonpartisan" (both in the right-wing and the left-wing of the union spectrum – Gianotti, 2002, Galvão, 2007) the connection between some union federations and political parties are well known. Since PT creation in 1980, and CUT in 1983, the two organizations maintain close relations and their affiliates are dedicated to a double militancy. The Union Force (FS), Brazil's second largest union federation, in its turn, is close to the *Democratic Labor Party* (PDT)⁷. Leaders of the General Workers' Union (UGT), the third largest union federation, are linked to different political parties, and were elected to public offices without giving up their union mandate⁸

Belonging to political parties resonates within the union federations because union currents tend to reproduce their parties position facing the government. While PT

⁵See, among others, the collection organized by Bridi, Ferraz and Vêras de Oliveira (2014).

⁶Ten new central unions emerged from 2004, adding to the three central unions created in the 1980s and 1990s (CUT, CGTB/General Workers' Federation of Brazil and Union Force), among which we highlight: Conlutas (National Coordination of Struggles), established in 2004 and whose name changed to CSP-Conlutas in 2010; NCST (New Union Workers' Federation), established in 2005; Intersindical, established in 2006; UGT (General Workers' Union) and the CTB (General Federation of Working Men and Women of Brazil), created in 2007 and CSB (Brazilian Unions' Central) in 2012. In 2008 the Intersindical was divided into: Intersindical – *instrument of struggle and organization of the working class* and Intersindical – *instrument of struggle, class unity and formation of a new central*. The latter founded Intersindical – Central of Working Class, in 2014.

⁷ Its president, Paulo Pereira da Silva, was elected representative by this party in 2006 and re-elected in 2010. Even becoming a parliamentary, he remained as the president of the central until 2013.

⁸ Roberto Santiago is a PSD/SP (Social Democratic Party) federal representative (he was affiliated to PV until 2011). David Zaia was elected state representative by PPS-SP (Popular Socialist Party) and is public management Secretary of São Paulo government since March 2012). Antonio Carlos dos Reis, Salim was federal representative by DEM (The Democrats) and is currently vice-mayor of Carapicuíba (SP). They are all UGT vice presidents.

was the opposition, it was possible the coexistence of different union currents within, but the federation internal balance changed when the party came to power. Most part of CUT, affiliated or sympathetic to PT, came to support the government, even with specific criticisms to some of the government initiatives; moreover, their former leaders have taken different positions in the administration⁹. This stance has triggered a splitting process by the CUT left-wing, identified with other political parties. Conlutas is mainly integrated by militants or close members to the *Unified Socialist Workers Party* (PSTU). An Intersindical portion is engaged to the *Socialism and Freedom Party* (PSOL), a party coming from the PT. The General Federation of Working Men and Women of Brazil (CTB) is identified to the *Communist Party of Brazil* (PCdoB) (Tropia, Galvão and Marcelino, 2013)¹⁰.

This labor movement extremely partisan does not restrict the union action to the labor relations field. Indeed, since the 1980s the union tasks are not limited to the economic field: the labor movement actively contributed to the dictatorship crisis and took up a position predominantly opposed to governments that followed the end of the dictatorship period. The PT victory maintained the labor movement political activity; however, that relationship has changed. One of the main achievements of the new political coalition in power – coalition that remains in the country direction in the past 12 years – was to support the majority part of the Brazilian labor movement to the government policy. In 2014, 10 of the 14 union federations supported the government¹¹.

⁹ Jaques Wagner, a former oil union member, was Minister of Labor and Employment from 2003 to 2004 and governor of Bahia between 2007 and 2014. Ricardo Berzoini, former president of the Bank Workers' Union of São Paulo, was Minister of Labor and Employment from 2004 to 2005. He was succeeded by Luiz Marinho, former president of the ABC metalworkers' union and former president of CUT, which later became Minister of Social Security (2007-2008) and mayor of São Bernardo do Campo (since 2009). Wagner and Berzoini returned to ministry during Dilma's government: the first as Minister of Defence in 2015 and the second as Minister of Institutional Relations (2014-2015) and Minister of Communications (2015).

¹⁰To explain such fragmentation we must also consider the maintenance of state corporatist union structure, based on the monopoly of the representation to a single local union and the compulsory deduction of union dues by the state. The law on union recognition approved in 2008 has contributed to the fragmentation of the top union federations by establishing criteria for representation and extending the compulsory union due to the officially recognized federations. In 2014, there were 14 federation unions in Brazil; 12 registered with the Ministry of Labor and Employment and two (Intersindical) not registered.

¹¹ Exceptions are the minorities Conlutas and Intersindical, which emerged precisely as a left-wing criticism to the PT government and to CUT's stand facing to it. The Union Force has an oscillating position, since it joined the government's coalition in 2006 but turned away in 2013, when its president, Paulinho, created a new party, the Solidarity, which supported the PSDB candidate in the 2014 presidential elections.

2. The institutional channels expansion opened to union participation

The support for the government translates into a willingness to participate in the institutional bodies created and/or expanded since 2003. In addition to introducing FNT and the CDES, the PT governments organized a series of conferences to discuss public policies in different areas, which ensured new spaces for workers' intervention through their organization unions and social movements.

However, despite all expectations generated about the creation of tripartite forums such as FNT and CDES, the union participation in shaping public policies faces several obstacles. First of all, it should be noted that Brazil is a country without social dialogue tradition, so that these forums operation was incipient and irregular. Second, both the composition of these forums and the selection criteria of their members, as their operating rules, limited the possibilities to discuss a specific union agenda.

FNT, designed to discuss the union and labor law reform, had an effective operation between 2003 and 2005, when the government sent to Congress a constitutional amendment proposal (PEC 369/2005) and submitted a draft bill, both according to the FNT consensus. These consensuses do not exceed, however, the deep differences between union and employers parliamentary fronts, as well as between workers' leadership and union organizations not integrated to FNT. This is because the government restricted the workers representation to union federations, excluding confederations (nationwide vertical entities and contrary to any corporatist union structure change) of the debate.¹²

The Congress reform course was suspended, partly due to the wear suffered by the government as a result of allegations of corruption in 2005 (the so-called "monthly allowance" crisis), and partly because of union resistance to measures disclosed. The threat to union monopoly of representation was enough for the confederations opposed the project. Furthermore, the power centralization by summit bodies would prejudice the unions' local autonomy, provoking criticism from the left-wing union, newly out CUT. Given this delicate political context, the government backed down. Instead of a comprehensive reform, it was chosen to just legalize the union federations,

¹² Although the FNT operating rules foresaw that in "consensus" absence case, the final decision would be up to the government.

incorporating them into official union structure and extending them compulsory financing provided through the transfer from a union dues portion (Galvão, 2008).

FNT debates focused on union reform, so that the labor law reform was not discussed in that context. This did not prevent, however, the government to implement, without discussing with the "social partners", a mini-labor law reform. Indeed, the Lula government has established different legal standards for certain target groups such as young people entering the labor market, and micro and small enterprise workers, and instituted hiring service providers in the condition of "juridical person" (enterprises constituted of a single person) (Galvão, 2008).

The CDES operation also generated dissatisfaction among union leaders. The first discontentment source was the business overrepresentation. The CDES has a societal and non-corporatist composition (Tapia, 2007). It is made up of business, union, social movements, government representatives as well as intellectuals and prominent personalities in cultural and philanthropic activities. In 2003, 48 percent of council members were linked to the business sector and 11 percent to unions. This disparity continued and, in 2010, the distribution was 44.3 percent and 18.8 percent respectively (Araújo, 2012, p. 118).

CDES has an advisory character and expresses a social dialogue perspective. It was not designed to have legislative functions, but to support government decisions, formulating proposals to be forwarded to the President of the Republic. Its goal was to build a social pact, focusing on reversing the inequalities. At first, the discussion focused on pension, tax and labor reforms (Tapia, 2007), however this agenda did not prosper and the pension reform implemented in 2003, which affected the civil servants' retirement, was not the council discussions result. After the "monthly allowance" crisis, the discussion turned to the construction of a *National Development Agenda*, approved in 2005.¹³

¹³ Civil servants, a sector with a heavily labor movement and with great presence within CUT, had their pensions reduced. The reform equaled the public sector retirement to the private sector, setting a maximum value of the benefit. Thus, new government employees no longer have the right to retirement equivalent to their full salary. Civil servants already retired, in turn, began contributing 11 percent of their retirement value that exceeds the maximum value imposed. The reform also established a supplementary retirement for those who wish to increase their benefits value, and extended to unions the ability to create pension funds to supplement the retirement. This reform was a major reason for the Conlutas and Intersindical creation, centrals that organize mainly civil servants unions.

Although the analysis of the CDES's ability to influence the government's strategic decisions are not conclusive, Tapia (2007) believes that the *Agenda* would have influenced the *Growth Acceleration Program* (PAC), approved in 2007, particularly with regard to the need for investment in infrastructure. The *Agenda* conceives development with income distribution and gives great importance to education, which are certainly workers interest issues, however, this is not properly a union agenda.

The union federations, however, have an extensive list of demands, and the two measures of the agenda approved by the government have not gone through the tripartite forums mediation, as we shall see in the following.

3. An intense institutional activity, however, a limited intervention

Despite the organizational division, the union federations have presented common demands and a certain unity of action. The list of demands comprises the minimum wage appreciation, the reduction of 44 to 40 workweek hours, the end of unjustified dismissal, the signature of the 151 ILO convention, the end of social security factor¹⁴, the end of outsourcing, increased resources for education and increased public investment. However, among the listed proposals, the only actually approved was the policy of adjusting the minimum wage, the result of an agreement negotiated between the federations and the government in 2007. The other demands are part of the *Labor's Positive Agenda*, prepared by the Interunion Department of Parliamentary Advice (DIAP) and supported by six union federations (CUT, FS, NCST, UGT, CTB and CGTB). This agenda was sent to the National Congress in May 2009. The Convention 151 of ILO (International Labor Organization), which deals with civil servants collective bargaining right, was enacted by a presidential decree in 2013, however it still lacks regulation.

The *Labor's Positive Agenda* was the basis for the preparation of the *Working Class Agenda For Development with Sovereignty, Democracy and Respect for Labor*, presented by CUT, FS, CTB, CGTB and NCST to the 2010 presidential candidates.

¹⁴ This measure, introduced by the pension reform undertaken by the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1998, aims to encourage private sector workers to delay retirement, as it cuts the value of pension by up to 40 percent.

This agenda has a positive assessment of Lula's government and advocates the election of "candidates committed to the working class ideas" trying to consolidate and extend the achievements obtained during the PT administrations. UGT, which has among its leadership parliaments affiliated to opposition parties towards the government, decided not to sign the document. This does not mean that it is an opposition federation, but that the internal partisan plurality prevented it to stand any candidate in the 2010 presidential election.

With the presidential elections proximity in 2014, the same proposals, that time supported by UGT, were taken up (Centrais, 2014a). This indicates that after four years, there was no progress regarding the incorporation of union demands.

To better evaluate the union intervention capacity, we choose to confront the demands written in documents drawn up by the union federations with legislation under appreciation by the National Congress. DIAP systematically monitors the draft bills of workers' interest, discussing their effects on union and labor rights. These projects were brought together in the document *Workers' Legislative Agenda in the Congress* (Diap, 2013), which provides various content information of the proposals and their authorship, allowing the reader to identify measures to workers and union organizations, as well as those that damage union and labor rights. Although there is a number of measures in which consequences are complex and do not allow a monolithic classification, most part of the proposals may be classified. To perform this procedure, we appeal also to the *Industry's Legislative Agenda*, created by the largest Brazilian summit employer organization, the National Confederation of Industry (CNI, 2014), which evaluates the draft bills as convergent or divergent to their interests.

Of the 102 proposals considered by DIAP, we classified 24 as contrary to the workers' interests, 3 as contrary to the unions, 38 as favorable to workers and 14 as favorable to unions. Among the 52 proposals favorable to workers and unions, only 5 were submitted by opposition parties, with the remainder (42) of PT initiative and other governing coalition parties¹⁵. The two main governing coalition parties (PR and PMDB, which hold the vice presidency between 2003-2010 and 2011-2014) were responsible, respectively, for the presentation of 3 and 7 draft bills contrary to workers.

¹⁵ We did not consider in this calculation 6 subjects which discussion started in previous legislatures. We considered the parties as follows: opposition: PSD, DEM, PSOL, PPS and PV; governing coalition: PT, PMDB, PCdoB, PDT, PR, PSD, PP, PSC, PRB, PTN, PTB (since 2011), PSB, PSC; the last 3 were not longer part of the governing coalition in 2013.

Among the proposals set out in the union federations common demands we highlight the presence of draft bills related to the workweek reduction, the end of social security factor, the end of unjustified dismissal and the outsourcing regulation. The workweek reduction to 40 hours is treated in two proposals in the Congress since the 1990s: PL 4653/1994, written by, at that time, Representative Paulo Paim (PT/RS), and the Constitutional Amendment Proposal 231/1995, written by Inácio Arruda (PCdoB/CE), evaluated negatively by the CNI document. The end of social security is treated in the PL 3299/2008, proposed by Senator Paulo Paim (PT/RS). The end of unjustified dismissal was referred by the Executive (389/2003, suggesting the assessment of the ILO Convention 158 – a subject also considered divergent by CNI and is also treated by the complementary proposed law 8/2003, by representative Maurice Rands (at the time PT/PE).

Regulating outsourcing has caused several controversies. In the mid-2000s, all union federations began to criticize the measure saying it was a form of precarious working conditions, rejecting the PL 4330/2004 that releases outsourcing to all types of activity (convergent project with CNI interests). However, while Conlutas and Intersindical advocate the end of all outsourcing, including the so-called support business activities, other federations, even though supporting the outsourcing end idea, understand that this is not about banning it peremptorily but regulate it. These union federations presented, through representative Vicentinho (PT/SP), the PL 1621/2007, establishing a restrictive outsourcing regulation, preventing it from being used in the core company activities.

The employers' opposition to subjects of workers interest can be observed not only in the *Industry's Legislative Agenda*, but also in a document created by CNI with proposals to "modernize" Brazilian labor relations (CNI, 2012). Although the union federations oppose to employers' proposals, they are nonetheless influenced by some elements of the "modernization" speech.

We shall exhibit, in the following, the major mobilizations related to the union federations' demands and indicate some sources of conflict between the minority and the hegemonic labor movement, a conflict due to the heterogeneity of concepts and union practices.

4. Manifestations and proposals: agreements and disagreements

As indicated by Boito and Marcelino (2010), strikes have grown from 2007. Between 2003 and 2009, the hegemonic union federations, along with other social movements, promoted six national marches "of the working class"; in 2009, they performed two unified acts against the economic crisis effects. Unified campaigns and actions were discontinued between 2010 and 2012, due to different stances taken during the 2010 presidential elections and distinct evaluations regarding Dilma's government. In 2013, there was the seventh edition of the working class march and in 2014 a new march was promoted.

The annual working class marches brought together somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 workers, a very small number compared with the size of the Brazilian labor market or even the number of unionized workers (according to PNAD/IBGE, in 2009 there were 92 million employed, 17.7 percent of whom were unionized)¹⁶. This data is even more significant when contrasted with the thousands of people who took to the streets in June 2013, in demonstrations not organized by the union federations and in which protesters carrying union flags – as well as political parties' flags – were harassed. The two unit national journeys of struggles and strikes, in July and August 2013, convened by the union federations with the goal of "advancing the workers' agenda at the Congress" did not reach the same size as the events of June, despite the wide agenda of demands.

Between the first march, in 2004, and the last, in 2014, there was an expansion in the list of revendications, going from the increase in the minimum wage and income tax table correction to: shorter workweek to 40 hours without payment reduction; end of social security factor; 10 percent of GDP for education; collective bargaining in the public sector; land reform; equal opportunities for men and women; fighting against unjustified dismissal; recovery of pensions policy; 10percent of the Union budget for health;; rejection to the PL 4330 regarding outsourcing; end of oil auctions; public transport quality.

¹⁶ We must consider, among the factors explaining these low ratings, the mobilization difficulties in such economic improvement context: despite the economic crisis of 2008, the average annual GDP growth was 4percent in the 8 years of Lula's government (2003-2010). The average of the first Dilma's mandate was significantly reduced, falling to 2 percent between 2011 and 2013.

The unity of action in the marches comprises the hegemonic unionism, since the minority pole, represented by Conlutas and Intersindical, believe that the demands are limited, and conceal union federations's willingness in negotiating with the government lowered agreements (Almeida, 2008). Even with the list of revendications expansion in 2013 and 2014 and the agreement regarding its content, minority union federations do not participate in the marches convocation, understanding that they do not blame the government for the worker's situation, and that they are used to support the government and not to confront it. On the other hand, they have signed draft bills together with the hegemonic union federations in order to build a unity of action for understanding that these projects approval can improve working conditions.

The differences between hegemonic unionism and the minority pole can be observed in negotiating points that apparently are unanimity among the union federations. Four examples allow us to indicate some of these differences, as well as illustrate the political moderation that characterizes the Brazilian labor movement summit. Outsourcing, as we already mentioned, the end of social security factor, the Specific Collective Agreement (ACE) and the Protection Plan of Employment (PPE).

Although all union federations demand the end of social security factor in pensions calculation, CUT, FS, UGT, NSCT and CGTB signed an agreement with Dilma's government replacing this 40 percent reduction mechanism by the factor 85/95. Therefore, the reducer is abolished only to insured persons for which the sum between time of contribution to social security and age at retirement time request result in 85 years (women) or 95 years (men)¹⁷.

Finally, the differences between union federations also extend to measures that represented a potential risk of labor relations flexibility. One of the CUT's most important member unions, ABC Metalworkers' Union, presented to the government in 2011 the Collective Bargaining Agreement with Special Purpose proposal, authorizing the unions to negotiate agreements with employers whose clauses derogate the Brazilian Labor Code, the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT). For such prerogatives, the unions must represent more than half of the category (in number of affiliated workers) and maintain a works council within the company with which it intends to negotiate

¹⁷ According to the agreement signatories, "our proposal takes into account the *need to preserve the system's sustainability* and not just end up with a formula for calculation" (Centrais Sindicais, 2012, our emphasis). One must remember that the end of social security factor was approved in the House of Representatives and in the Senate in 2010, but was vetoed by President Lula.

(according to the most optimistic union estimates, there are only 200 companies with works council across the country). The unions with these two prerequisites should be able, by the Ministry of Labor, to perform such agreements, which must be approved by secret vote, with the participation of at least 50 percent of workers involved, for at least 60 percent of voters.

For the ABC Metalworkers' Union president, "the special collective agreement is a new tool that should enable workers and companies to solve, with legal certainty, specific demands in the workplace without changing the legislation or put at risk labor rights guaranteed by the CLT (Consolidation of Labor Laws) and by the Federal Constitution [...] The special collective agreement is intended to stimulate dialogue, direct negotiation and honor the agreement as a way to modernize labor relations leaving nothing to be desired to any nation in the world" (Nobre, 2012). This proposal was accepted by CUT, which generated an internal criticism due to the flexibility threat it represents.

The Protection Plan of Employment (PPE), negotiated between union federations and government in 2014, is also controversial, to the extent that allows the reduction of the working hours with wage reduction. The salary, reduced by an amount of up to 30 percent would be paid by the company and supplemented up to a certain amount by the government. PPE could be used by companies that proved going through a period of crisis and it is seen by its supporters as a way to avoid dismissals. However, critics are concerned that it represents regression in labor law. This is, for example, CTB position, which participated in the negotiation and later criticized the plan (CTB, 2014). CUT, the main government partner in the negotiation, faces an internal resistance from organizations which understand that the union federation should focus its struggle on statement and expansion of rights, reaffirming its historic ideas by reducing working hour, without wage reduction (Contracs, 2014).

Final Considerations

An analysis of the path of Brazilian unionism during the PT governments reveals that unionism is not alienated from politics: politics and the state influence the unions, and the labor movement plays a political role, a role that varies according to the aims of the organization in question. .

Despite the organizational division, the union federations have presented a common agenda and a certain unity of action. The union federations increased their institutional participation and present a number of proposals to PT governments. These proposals, especially those representing a substantial expansion of rights, such as the reduction of workweek hours, have not found favorable reception by the political system. The marches – episodic and with low compliance – have been insufficient to enable the approval of the union agenda, an agenda which main features remain unchanged.

The heterogeneity of concepts and union practices, their different strategies and forms of struggle, generate tensions and conflicts, especially among the minority and the hegemonic labor movement. This, willing to negotiation, is also more permeable towards the employer speech, moderating its demands. Conflicts also interfere with the agenda approval, given the difficulty of setting up a broad program unit, as not always the agreement on the demands and claims means that they are understood and defended in the same way.

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