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Jon Las Heras and Beltrán Roca
New practices in industrial relations
Radical unionism in the European periphery
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Introduction: Radical critique as a forward strategy

Neoliberal globalization has substantially transformed the landscape in which organized labour sought to advance its interests during Fordism. The scaling up of market relations and capital movements, the subsequent erosion of national Keynesian fiscal and monetary policy paradigms, and deregulation of labour market institutions, including collective bargaining and flexibilization of contracts, has eroded the presence and capacity of unions to mobilize the workplace (Silver, 2003; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013). Traditional trade unions' shrinking power resources mirror such a process and hence displaced and precarious workers and organizations have sought to incorporate new voices, forging new alliances and engaging in new struggles and forms of collective action to switch the balance of class forces. The European peripheral countries have been exposed to some of the worst conditions of the neoliberal crisis that has lasted more than ten years; and it is in countries like Greece, Italy, Portugal or Spain that the challenge of reinventing and radicalizing trade unions and working class organizations has become more urgent.

Radical trade unionism has been defined as an alternative approach to labour unionism, focused on class struggle, engagement in social movement actions beyond the workplace and politicized union strategies aligned to new left political groups (Connolly et al., 2014). Although there can be found different models of radical unionism – for example, in some cases focusing on gremial, e.g. professional workers, or occupational identities, or other cases with a more clear political orientation – they tend to show disdain for social partnerships and define their identities in opposition to corporatist and social-democratic trade unions. We may analyse radical unions then in and through their radical critique and struggle against ex-

isting ideological, political and economic social practices and institutions that presuppose an 'equilibrium' within the current state of affairs or presuppose that one can be attained if the correct set of policies and institutional regulations are deployed.

Radical unionism unfolds a dynamic vision (instead of static) of capitalist development, one that necessarily embraces class struggle as well as other subaltern groups' demands as the right step forward, that is, by adopting a *critical* stand to the formation of social classes, labour organizations and their related strategies. This presupposes an open logic *in and of* history, rather than a closed and teleological one – e.g. that the 'mass strike' or national based socialist revolutions are the only feasible strategy, or that European social democracy is the ultimate solution to the current crises – because it is only through *our practical reflection* (Gramsci, 1971; Gunn, 1987) that contemporary social relations (of domination) may acquire new and unforeseeable meanings. Thus, social structures and labour organizations become the historical ground for new forms of emancipated praxis; or to put it simply: from the very core, radical unionism may be interpreted as workers' organizations struggling to *move beyond* their own limits (Fairbrother, 2015: 573) so that the original challenges that they pose to themselves acquire a new dimension. Hence, it is through conscious collective action upon historical forms of social domination and representation that we may purposefully establish the *material* basis for a different living.

There is a social and academic debate on the limits and possibilities of radical political unionism. Crucially, we cannot underestimate the historical conditions in which radical unions intervene or even presuppose there might be a *pure* paradigm of revolutionary praxis to be discovered. As early Marxist engagements with trade union politics underlined (Hyman, 1989), there is no single definition of a trade union, neither of a radical

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union or social movement union: it is only the particular way in which workers' organize in and across sectors that labour organizations have a concrete force (Gramsci, 1977). In comparative terms, this suggests that any critical analysis must be susceptible to historical uneven developments, institutional configurations and cultural sensitivities that have resulted in the variegated landscape of union formation and industrial relations frameworks that we face today (Hyman, 2001; Herod, 2001; McGrath-Champ et al., 2010). As Bieler and Jordan (2018) and Las Heras (2018c) argue, it is only then that a historical materialist analysis allows us to better grasp why certain labour movements organize and tackle particular dilemmas in the way they do. This is the methodological basis for a successful strategic reading of different forms of radical unionism, in which possible generalizations are qualified and contextualized, so that 'benchmarking' and 'one-size-fits-all' conclusions are omitted. Nevertheless, not doing so justifies sheer relativistic interpretations that preclude any effective political debate. These idealistic inversions can only take place when we misrecognize the historical moment in which we intervene: that concrete forms of radical unionism spring *within* a capitalist society in which commodity production and capital accumulation determine our social reproduction and related forms of contestation, including the inherent antagonism between labour and capital whose critique cannot occur from the outside, and so, it must be immanent (Iñigo-Carrera, 2007; Starosta, 2016). Thus, in the concluding section we will outline several strategic lessons we consider relevant from the four countries studied; these may allow us to transcend simplistic dichotomies of radical versus non-radical strategies towards union renewal, and bring forward the importance of self-critique in the conscious mobilization of our forces to organize and satisfy our needs differently.

On a more concrete plane, Connolly and Darlington (2012), for example, highlighted the renewal potential of several militant and politicized trade unions that has developed in sev-

eral countries and/or industries. Although, in general terms, union membership and social power are declining, cases of union resilience and combativity can influence the discussion on union revitalization. These authors examined the cases of the National Federation of Unions Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers in the French and UK railway industries. These unions combine continuous mass strike action with left ideological opposition to both employers and governments. Denis (2012), however, pointed out that it is misleading to describe its orientation as 'political' in these cases because the union and its members are focused on industrial action, and the organization presents itself as 'apolitical', following the statements of the Charte d'Amiens. He added that political radicalization does not seem to be a successful strategy for union renewal. From our perspective, this is a sterile discussion because both parties seem to use different meanings for the term 'political'. Nevertheless, the main arguments of Denis are correct about the two limits of radical unionism: first, that due to its political orientation it is unable to appeal to the full range of (in this case, railway) workers; second, that the strategy of non-cooperation with management and its high militancy tends to 'burn out' members. We may take this as an example of 'voluntarism' in which the self-portrayed radicalism of the labour movement cannot grasp its own determinations. First, the historical context makes the interests of the rank-and-file appear fragmented. Second, the importance of understanding that accepting 'industrial peace' once the conflict has started is more than probable, and even desirable, so that those struggling can eventually improve or maintain the value of their labour power and living conditions and, hence, *actually* manage to 'win a share of the pie'. In any case, the limitations of radical unionism must be balanced and contrasted with the limitations of 'mainstream' unionism, which are, without any doubt, significant.

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In this chapter we attempt to shed light on the debate about the scope and limits of radical unionism by exploring recent developments of radical unions and new forms of workers' representation in the Southern periphery of the European Union. First, we describe the most notorious radical unions and worker self-organization in Greece, Italy and Portugal. Second, we analyze the two main expressions of radical unionism in contemporary Spain: the anarcho-syndicalist tradition and sovereigntist trade unions, which experienced significant growth before and after the 2008 crisis and, consequently, can provide important information about the factors that favor or hinder the advance of this type of unionism. Finally, we summarize the key findings about the development of radical unions in those countries, notwithstanding the importance of apprehending them critically. Overall, the various examples point towards the importance of radicalizing the political horizons of the unions both internally (by deploying greater efforts in the coordination and technical support of the rank-and-file) and externally (by building stronger alliances with other unions and social movements), so that we may perhaps anticipate in a more encompassing way the exponential fragmentation of the labour market and retrenchment of the welfare state that we have seen during the last decades.

Radical unionism and worker self-organization in Greece, Italy and Portugal

The European periphery has followed an uneven integration process within European capitalism, posing different accumulation patterns and contradictions that necessarily qualify unifying transnational counter-hegemonic strategies (Bieler et al., 2019). This has occurred together with the uneven development of industrial relations frameworks in which each

country follows its own cultural and institutional particularities (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013) and patterns of industrial conflict (Dribbusch and Vandaele, 2016). Different expressions of radical unionism and class empowerment (Roca and Las Heras, 2020) must then be understood within their own context in spite of global capitalism positing a systemic limit to their idiosyncrasies and victories (see Kicillof and Starosta, 2007). As suggested before, any voluntaristic reading of their emancipatory potential must be problematized and made subject to critical inquiry if we do not want to obviate the fact that radical unionism does also transform and reproduce capitalism.

Greece

The crisis that erupted in Greece in 2010 had more extensive consequences than the deep restructuring of collective bargaining that was imposed by the Troika (Hermann, 2014); it also entailed an open, full-throttle attack on the overall well-being of Greek citizens (through privatizations, and monetary and fiscal austerity) and 'non-Greeks' (through closing borders or limiting the assistance to Middle East and African refugees).[1] The suffering and disempowerment of Greek workers pushed, however, critical-radical labour movements to reinvent themselves in multiple ways, generating new forms of collective action that tackled social and economic stress.

With respect to industrial relations, Greek unions have traditionally followed a pluralist structure in which a mixture of ideological conservatism and clientelistic relations has undermined the potential of union renewal during the last decades of neoliberal governance. The two main private (the General Workers' Confederation of Greece – GSEE) and public (the Supreme Administration of Public Servants Unions –

[1] For an analysis of Cypriot forms of unionism and radical activism see Ioannou and Sonan (2017).

the conditions for more advantageous ideological debates and demands, as occurred with the Basque Chart of Social Rights. The renewed cultural dimension in the process of national and state building in Galicia and the Basque Country provides a very interesting example of the strategic importance of ensuring broader social presence and identity. Radical unionism can, therefore, become a recurrent strategy in the formation of the working class and the transformation of the state in which the balance of class forces tilts in favor of labor.

7. As a final note, we would like to recall that a materialist critique forces us to acknowledge the limited scope of intervention of the practices we have outlined throughout this chapter. Methodologically and, no less importantly, politically, such positioning avoids reproducing 'voluntaristic' readings that underplay the social relations of domination that substantiate class struggle, no matter how radical these may seem to be. Hence, grasping the ongoing incapacity of radical unions to generate and develop genuine anti-capitalist practices can only push us to think what it is that is really missing. Or, in other words, how may radical forms of labor organization effectively challenge the way in which our social metabolism is mediated by the commodity form and the logic of capital accumulation? Are there any desirable horizons we would prefer to be situated at? And if so, how should we intervene in and struggle for them? How would these radical practices make us more conscious of our own limitations?

cases to become a point of reference to other networks and organizations beyond their territorial/industrial limits.

4. Despite growing institutional and legal obstacles, the use of strikes and strike funds has been a fundamental element for trade union renewal. At the workplace level, strikes contribute to achieving important labor rights and consolidating workers' power. At other scales, and most importantly at the confederal one, strikes have also been strategically (and symbolically) redefined as a tool for political action (especially in the Italian case) and membership recruitment (as in the Basque case).

5. The need to amplify the scope of alternative horizons is tantamount to the lack of empowerment of the working class. In that sense, and no matter how original and inclusive the projects might be understood, we can conclude that most of the radical experiences still operate at the margins, and that they lack institutional-legal strength and/or organizational continuity. Dependence on informal leadership, the lack of organizational resources and the competition from other moderated unions that tend to be backed by public authorities and employers when threatened by radical unions tend to impede a greater development of radical unions.

6. The examples of the Basque Country and Galicia show that there is no need to remain marginal and 'puritan' since organizational transformation is possible. This might also be important in order to produce coherent and lasting practices that incorporate particular victories into the organizational memory. Without overstating their success, which would only lead us to corporatist readings, holding onto particular forms of class power might be the unique way in certain contexts to generate

ADEDY) confederations incorporate and coordinate all unions in collective bargaining, including the radical ones which are operating at sector or workplace levels, and thus function under the umbrella of the confederations. Despite certain differences, both confederations have relied heavily on state economic support to finance their activities, and their ties to both social democratic and conservative political parties have reduced their political autonomy and combatant scope. Among the different ideological currents within the two confederations, the All-workers Militant Front (PAME), related to the Greek Communist Party (KKE), represents the most ambitious and radical fraction.[2] Zambarloukou (2006) presents nevertheless Greece as a standard case of 'state corporatism' in which union officials and their members, 'the insiders', have had little incentive to reach out to non-organized and precarious sectors, thus resulting in very scant unionization rates in the private sector and larger affiliation rates in the public sector, where PAME has its strongest presence (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou, 2017: 85). Therefore, the major response from these two confederations has occurred in the form of general strikes by mobilizing their strongholds. Their limited effectiveness (see Hamann et al., 2013) has encouraged many workers to seek beyond traditional forms of protest and, in parallel, to radicalize the general strikes and street protests, which often ended in massive riots, and to generate new solidarity networks. During the crisis, emblematic struggles have been: those of the cleaners of the Finance Ministry who held and extended a strike against outsourcing, those of the public and private transport systems, and the public education sector and administration workers against lay-offs and wage cuts that repeatedly blocked the streets of the major cities (Broumas et al., 2016).

[2] For more details see pamehellas.gr

The economic crisis has brought the contradictions of Greek capitalism to the surface, and yet, according to Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou (2015: 227) radical unions operated well before the crisis, engaging precarious workers since the late 1990s. They became more extended since the massive riots and mobilizations of December 2008 in Athens, in which two police and fascist attacks killed and seriously injured the 16-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos and the Bulgarian activist Kostantina Kuneva. Overall, radical unions have been more present in the two largest cities, Athens and Thessaloniki, but also in Patras, and among organized delivery workers, media and digital workers, waiters and catering personnel or the vast number of new NGO workers that appeared during the crisis, among others (Karakioulafis and Kanellopoulos, 2018). 'In 2009, several precarious workers unions moved a step forward, founding a horizontal primary union Coordinating Body, as an alternative to the GSEE's coordination structures' (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015: 228). Similar to Italian autonomist projects, this has taken the form of the Athenian Coordinating Body and the 'Workers' Clubs' (Ergatikes Leshes) which have emerged as territorially grounded worker decision assemblies and support structures that transcend economic/professional patterns of solidarity (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou, 2017: 92). Despite not being new in labour history (Hobsbawm, 1984), and not having the institutional nor legal power to operate actively in collective bargaining rounds and calls for strikes, these coordinating bodies are new in Greece, and present themselves as more horizontal opportunities to engage with those workers that are displaced from traditional mechanisms of collective bargaining and representation.

The defence of the 'commons' and public services has also been a field of struggle, a spring of radical activism and a source

1. In spite of the severe homogenizing trends and austerity across South Europe, *radical projects emerge from particular problems/challenges*. The form in which radical workers and organizations respond is, hence, constitutive of the uneven development of capitalism and working-class formation. More concretely, Portuguese or Spanish unions have not confronted the same migrant and refugee crisis that Greece and Italy have faced, or the anti-austerity campaigns that have followed different logics in Portugal or Greece due to the different depths of the austerity measures imposed by the Troika.

2. Radical unionism consists of multiple and overlapping practices that decentre, question and transcend traditional forms of worker representation and engagement. The crisis of neo-corporatist arrangements under flexible capitalism has led mainstream trade unions to a crisis of representation, and this gap has, in some cases, been occupied by alternative and more confrontational forms of unionism, which have shown themselves to be able to mobilize those 'hard to organize' precarious workers.

3. Radical unionism may turn capitalist offensives into working-class victories, no matter how partial and limited these might be. The described cases of radical unionism and workers' self-organization show that they can bring important improvements for workers through industrial action, bargaining and getting involved with other movements in wider social struggles. In fact, the more victories at different scales that radical unions have been able to achieve and consolidate, the more the organization and consciousness of those involved grows. Victories have driven radical unions in some

sive policies to precarious youth and securing the pension system. Following a ten-day metal-sector strike in the province of Biscay in 2019, and which found solidarity from pensioner and feminist movements that have been very active during recent years, a one-day general strike was organized in January 2020 in the defence of the Social Chart. Overall, these examples show how 'traditional' unions may depart from outdated forms of action and embrace union renewal thoroughly, questioning economistic and institutionalized strategies, and yet without diluting themselves into organizational contingency and political marginalization.

Conclusion: Beyond passive and defensive strategies as the way forward

This chapter has shown how radical unions and labour movements in the European periphery have been and still are a source of inspiration for revolutionary purposes: that brave, non-conformist and genuinely solidaristic strategies that criticize dominant forms of capitalist governance and which imply alternative projects that conceive human relations in a different way are possible. Different contexts produce different challenges, and so we have tried to be spatially sensitive, without pretending that there should be unified reading on how radical unionism should be understood and appropriated in the European periphery. Perhaps, in that sense, we have been overly descriptive, since each country and social group has unfolded genuine patterns of radical critique and intervention that transcend simplistic analytical categorizations. Nevertheless, to conclude and wrap up the various examples treated in the chapter, we consider it important to point out a few strategic lessons.

of union renewal.[3] Crucially, the extensive privatization programme imposed by the Troika was opposed by the joint action between public sector workers and social movements. In the case of the water supply systems, workers in Thessaloniki and Athens stoked and engaged in public campaigns in the defence of basic services, ending in the constitutional court that stopped the privatization scheme in the region of Athens. The relatively weak organizing capacity of traditional unions encouraged radical workers to look elsewhere in order to limit fiscal austerity and further retrenchment of the welfare state. As Bieler and Jordan explain:

> The ongoing suspicion of trade union confederations has meant that many individual activists of the Athens and Thessaloniki water company unions have developed novel political practices in an attempt to address the disconnection between their institutionalised organisation and wider civil society. In this process, their union practice has become 'effectively reborn', including the autonomy of their union activities from all mainstream political parties. (2018: 12)

In addition to anti-austerity struggles, Greek radical unions and social movements established a rich network of neighbourhood-based gift-giving and sharing communities in order to alleviate the hardships of widespread unemployment and poverty. For example, during the massive protests and occupations of Syntagma Square in 2010–11, the Waiters, Chefs and Catering Union of Athens was the first to organize 'strike soup kitchens' to support all the activities, unemployed and precarious workers and families that participated in public

[3] The 'commons' should not be understood as a *terra nullius* or virgin space that is appropriated in a communal basis, but rather as the very produce of the *act* of 'commoning', that is, 'the self-management [and transformation] of natural resources … by a community of users, following collective mechanisms and democratic procedures of institutional representation that are grounded upon non-mercantilist societal values and forms of abstraction' (Renteria-Uriarte and Las Heras, 2022).

demonstrations (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015: 229; see also Karakioulafis and Kanellopoulos, 2018). On the other hand, in the defence of local employment, workers have sometimes opted for the cooperative formula and collectivized bankrupt companies, engaging the public and striving to show that another economy based on more democratic principles and closer ties to the 'stakeholders' is possible (Broumas et al., 2016).

Finally, it might be worthwhile mentioning the invaluable support that Greeks have had towards refugees, and especially if we take into consideration the dire economic conditions in which it has taken place. Social movements and community unions have evoked the Greek and Turkish diasporas in order to empathize with refugees, hence taking historical collective responsibility for the well-being of those displaced by war, political repression or economic hardship (Oikonomakis, 2018). Thus, rather than becoming an adjective or attribution, the purposeful agency of Greek workers and citizens has absorbed regular language and named some of these people as 'solidarians', as those who *are* in a relationship of solidarity and do not act sporadically (Rozakou, 2016). In that sense, and notwithstanding the obvious historical limits of Greek radical labour movements in transforming their environment, as Papataxiarchis argues, 'when "social cohesion" is under threat in conditions of austerity, solidarity becomes a project, an 'alternative horizon' aimed at combating alienation and atomisation' (2016: 205).

Italy

The Italian pluralist system of labour relations allows the existence of significant expressions of radical unionism. Beyond the three biggest trade union confederations – the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL) and the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL) – there is a myriad of rank-and-file trade

linguistic and political trends, has encouraged these unions to give a different meaning to their nation-building project (e.g. Ipar-Hegoa, 2016). The CIG has defended the production of a labour-friendly state through various mobilizations and legal initiatives in which social and linguistic rights are placed at the centre of political discourse (CIG, 2017: 26–41). Meanwhile, Basque unions have organized a wide range of multiple events and alliances with social movements in the promotion of a Basque 'ecosocialist' project of national liberation.[8] Perhaps two actions that transcend the recurrent social dialogue practices that dominate in Madrid are worth noting. First, Alternatiben Herria ('The country of alternatives') was a two-day mobilization event that occurred in three different cities in three consecutive years that grouped unions, social movements and academics in a debate of alternative paths to current capitalist development.[9] Whilst no concrete programme of action was proposed, it was crucial in the mutual recognition of different labor, feminist and ecological organizations that common problems are shared. Second, and directly related to it, a set of radical unions and social movements have presented and defended a Basque Chart of Social Rights,[10] which proclaims the necessity of transforming the current neoliberal governance institutions into more labour friendly and sustainable logics. In that, the multiple alliance demands the rise of the minimum wage to €1200, so that the European Chart of Social Rights gains force. Also demanded are the extension and improvement of the universal basic income, lowering working hours, recognizing and valuing feminized care work, developing more inclu-

[8] See Renteria-Uriarte and Las Heras (2022) for a detailed analysis of a particular movement (Biltzarre) that prefigures a form of Basque 'communalism' with strong ecological and democratic values, and which are partially derived from their critical reading of ancient Basque practices that take self-management as a fundamental political principle.

[9] See alternatibenherria.eus

[10] See eskubidesozialenkarta.com

'counter-power bloc' (organized by ELA-LAB-ESK and a few others) and the 'social dialogue bloc' of CCOO-UGT, since the former have been capable of striking on average 32 times more than the latter between 2000 and 2018.

The particular conflict of outsourced workers in Telefónica that López-Andreu (2020) studies shows how Basque workers, and the small independent union ESK, were capable of implementing a more coherent and integrative strategy that allowed them to endure, hence resulting in a much better agreement than the rest of Spanish workers who also engaged in industrial action but did not have an effective union umbrella. Similarly, *falsos autónomos* (fake self-employed) workers in the meat industry in Galicia were capable of turning upside down the dire conditions in which they were employed through a combination of rank-and-file organizing efforts and legal disputes. In the meat factory of Frigolouro in Portiño, few workers with unstable and precarious conditions were capable of mobilizing the factory in which the CCOO and UGT had the representative majority but were not eager to struggle to improve the labour rights of the self-employed (for the union's active role as 'managers of precariousness' see also Las Heras, 2018b). The struggle extended to other factories and the meat-processing company had to employ around 1100 workers and pay €25 million to compensate for outstanding wages. Therefore, these two examples are a few among many others that show how Basque and Galician unions have not reneged on engaging in effective conflictive industrial relations in times of neoliberal globalization, and in that sense, they have not needed to engage in decentred forms of unionism, such as social movement unionism that somehow presupposes an amalgamation of stakeholders, to remain ideologically and organizationally present at the workplace.

Finally, the counter-hegemonic strategy of these unions is not limited to more traditional forms of collective action. The defence of an original culture, vis-à-vis Spanish homogenizing

unions that remain critical of social dialogue and put emphasis on anti-capitalist politics, direct action and internal democracy. This is the case, among others, of the following unions:

- The Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB), born in the 1980s as a reaction against the centralization of major trade union confederations, is the biggest union with an important representation in the railway, airport, education and banking sectors (Gall, 1995);
- The Confederazione dei Comitati di Base (Cobas), born in the education sector and later expanded to other industries;
- The anarcho-syndicalist Unione Sindacale Italiana (USI), which has some representation in the healthcare sector;
- The Organizzazione Sindacati Autonomi (OrSA);
- The Unione Sindacale di Base (USB), founded in 2010 partly from the federation of public workers that split from CUB;
- The Sindacato Intercategoriale Lavoratori Autorganizzati (SiCobas), especially strong in the logistics sector and involved in migrant organizing.

One defining characteristic of these organizations is their political approach to labour organizing, which involves spatial practices that attempt to connect the workplace with the territory (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou, 2017). This new geography involves developing union structures to address working-class problems beyond the workplace. CUB, for example, has a tenants' union as one of its federations. Spatial practices also include mobilizing for social rights and an organizational effort to connect with segments of the working-class employed in secondary and deregulated labour markets that have tended to

be ignored by major trade union confederations, such as migrant day labourers and workers in the logistics sector. In addition to rank-and-file trade unions, in certain outsourced and deregulated sectors there have emerged extra-union forms of worker self-organization, which have tended to compete with existing trade unions. This is the case of educational workers in outsourced firms (Borraccino and Gentile, 2019).

Italian radical unions have responded along two lines to the new context of deregulation: work transformation and neoliberal policy after 2008, and social mobilization (Colleoni et al., 2014) and their focus on organizing migrant and precarious workers. Regarding social mobilization, these unions have frequently created or joined wider coalitions for wider political campaigns. In addition, in some cases rank-and-file unions have called together for national strikes, sometimes focusing on certain industries in which they are strong, sometimes calling for general strikes. Nonetheless, with the exception of Si Cobas in the logistics sector (Cillo and Pradella, 2018), Italian rank-and-file unions do not have the strength to stop production effectively. While we are writing this chapter, Italian radical unions are promoting a new wave of strikes throughout the country in response to the deterioration of working conditions under the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

With respect to migrant workers in the agrifood industry – which in 2015 covered 400,000 workers, half of them being EU citizens and the other half not – D'Onofrio and Las Heras (forthcoming) explore how different unions have tried more recently to protect and organize migrant workers who are deprived of any formal security, thus developing variegated strategies that involved both institutional-legal actions and grass-root forms of organizing and mobilizing (for a more extensive review see Marino et al., 2015; Marini and Rinaldini, 2017). On the one hand, FLAI-CGIL has followed a multi-layered strategy. First, it has pushed for the introduction of new legal regulations that place severe criminal penalties on

pendentist' unions and 'Spanish' unions over the production of the capitalist state and territorial spaces.

Second, and directly related to the former, these three unions have questioned the 'hollowed out' model of collective bargaining prevailing in Spain and which has not been effective to secure workers' wages and rights during recent decades (cf. Fernández-Rodríguez et al., 2016; López-Andreu, 2019). Most importantly, these unions have transformed their organizations to mobilize workers at their workplaces, fostering industrial action and class identities. This requires a systematic questioning of institutionalized forms of collective bargaining and to deploy financial resources (e.g. the establishment of strike funds) as well as cognitive ones (e.g. train union officials, delegates and working groups that mix lawyers and economists) into the systematic empowering of the rank-and-file. In so doing, Galician and, most outstandingly, Basque workers have engaged in industrial disputes at the workplace level (including outsourced, feminized and precarious sectors) and recorded unionization rates, strike rates and bargaining victories that divert significantly from collective bargaining patterns across Spain (Las Heras, 2018a; 2019). A recent study shows how embracing the strategy of being always ready to engage in industrial conflict, through the organization of confederal strike funds and deploying legal, economic and political experts in the accompanying of collective bargaining, has produced significant strike records and a more positive sense of social legitimation, that is unionization rates remain relatively higher and the capacity to mobilize the entire workforce (e.g. in the form of general strikes) is greater in the Basque Country than the rest of Spain (Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021). As a symptom of such conflict-oriented union renewal strategy, the study finds the Basque Country recording the highest strike rates in Europe during the neoliberal period of general 'quiescence' and also that this has generated a schism between the self-proclaimed

their organizational practices substantially (including the articulation and use of strong ‘strike funds’) so that they could engage in industrial action and mobilize the rank-and-file effectively (Las Heras and Rodríguez, 2021). We will review their recent history and major contributions to collective bargaining, industrial conflict and the formation of alliances with other social and labour movements.

First, on a more formal plane, there has been and continue to be a fierce struggle over the levels of collective bargaining and territorial representation. As labour geographers have well pointed out (Herod, 2001; McGrath-Champ et al., 2010), unions and other forms of organized labor produce their own spaces *in and of* capitalism that follow particular strategies that include/exclude other working-class factions. These lead to intra-class conflicts that aim at accommodating/subverting certain geographies in which the (corporatist) interests of some groups prevail over others. Since the Zapatero reform of 2011, in Spain the CCOO and UGT hold the right to generate agreements that exclude lower ‘territorial levels’ from negotiating some or all the working conditions outlined in a collective agreement. This has generated tensions with ‘independentist’ unions for violating their autonomy while struggling for better working conditions than the CCOO and UGT can negotiate in Madrid. ELA and LAB have responded by pushing for a Basque-level agreement that gives more statutory rights to Basque agreements than to the Spanish ones, although court disputes have qualified their validity (Elkoro, 2019). Following their example, CIG promotes the reform of labour law and is also trying to establish a parallel agreement so that there is a territorial consolidation of the victories of Galician workers. To their eyes, mobilizing the rank-and-file within their national framework of action generates a dynamic that overcomes centralized and institutionalized bargaining procedures that have not been able to secure and enforce dignifying labour rights (CIG, 2020). In that sense, at the very core, there is a struggle between ‘inde-

those employers hiring workers illegally and violating basic labour rights. The law was passed in 2016 and is the result of several sector strikes, demonstrations and national campaigns organized during the last few decades both by migrant farmhands and Italian trade unions in order to denounce work exploitation and informal work (Valentini, 2018). The new regulations also fostered the establishment of a ‘High Quality Farm Work Network’, which allowed job centres, employment agencies, workers’ organizations and employers to join the network on a voluntary basis in order to manage at the workplace or community level the demand and supply of (migrant) labour in agricultural areas like Puglia, Basilicata, Campania or Calabria. The limits to such institutional strategy towards union renewal (cf. Baccaro et al., 2003), however, depend on the presupposition that the government augments its budget so that labour inspectors can track such pervasive practices. In the absence of such redeployment of economic resources the law is likely to be ineffective.

Meanwhile, and complementary to such institutional forms of class empowerment, FLAI-CGIL has developed three strategies at the workplace level. First, to settle ‘assistance points’ in which free legal-consultory services are provided so that workers can check on their social security position, wages and work contracts. Second, during the summer harvesting season, for three months, ‘street union squads’ go out early in the morning every day to meet farm workers and give them information about their working rights – wages, working time, health, contracts, social security, unemployment benefits and especially information about the possibility of denouncing informal labour and exploitation to the labour inspectorate. The underlying objective is to meet workers, make direct contact with them and, when possible, encourage them to come to the union’s office. Third, and strictly related to the previous one, to support and train migrant workers to build a ‘grass-root union representation’ system.

Complementary to these actions, other more radical unions like USB have organized more encompassing campaigns that avoid putting all the pressure on small farmers-employers, since the latter suffer the pressures of a rather restrictive and very competitive global value chain (GVC) structure. To avoid counter-productive outcomes, USB has striven to

> build an integral alliance between local workers and farmers, and national consumers so that they can pressure 'from the beginning until the end' of the GVC the dominant firms at the top of agri-food chains. [Their] major claim is to defend the production of healthy food through securing a decent life for all the workers, [and] to introduce an ethical code within agri-food supply chains. (D'Onofrio and Las Heras, 2021)

The struggle for migrant workers continues, as both USB and FLAI-CGIL aim at organizing and mobilizing this large sector so that working class-fractioning processes that may unblock and boost chauvinist, racist or even fascist sentiments are as minimal as possible.

Portugal

In contrast to the trade union plurality that defines the structure of trade unionism in Spain, Italy and Greece, in Portugal there are no significant expressions of independent radical unionism. A radical stream can be found inside some unions. The complexity of Portuguese unionism partly derives from the inheritance of the corporatist system during its dictatorship up until the Carnation Revolution in 1974. The two largest union confederations are the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP-IN) and the General Workers' Union (UGT), which have most of the membership and representation. There is also another independent union confederation, the União dos Sindicatos Independentes (USI) which claims to have 15,000 members and is affiliated to the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (which

power' unionism that stands in opposition to predominant social democratic and centralist strategies in Spain. These unions – who hold more votes in union elections in their respective territories and cross the 15 per cent legal representativeness threshold that allows them to participate in sector and confederal bargaining rounds – define themselves as anti-capitalist, 'ecosocialist' and feminist.[7] Nevertheless, union renewal debates in Spain have placed little attention on their practices and organizational innovations (but tangentially see Köhler, 2008; and Calleja, 2016). Unfortunately, the particularities of the Basque or Galician unions have not been studied as much in depth as the two major Spanish Unions, the CCOO and UGT, nor even probably as much as the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, but when they have this has been predominantly done by activists and journalists related to those unions themselves (for the Basque unions see e.g. Elorrieta, 2011; Kortabarria, 2016; Majuelo, 2000; Bustillo, 2008; whilst for CIG, a union official commented to us that there have been very few studies of their union).

Their experiences remain worthwhile mentioning since they have managed to consolidate renewal practices that go beyond the margins in which most of the radical unions operate (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou, 2015: 231–2). Therefore, and as we explain elsewhere (Roca and Las Heras, 2020), the degree of empowerment that these unions hold is relatively greater than many of the radical unions and social movement unions studied previously because they present deeper, more extended and effective organizing patterns that place Basque and (to a lesser degree) Galician workers into stronger ideological, institutional and economic positions. Fundamentally, these unions, and in particular the Basque ones, have renewed

[7] ELA, with 90,000 members, holds 41 per cent of the votes in union elections in the Basque Country; LAB, with 39,000 members, holds 19 per cent; ESK, with 5000 members, holds around 2 per cent of the votes; and CIG, with 6000 members, holds 28 per cent of the votes in Galicia.

In sum, it can be said that anarcho-syndicalist unions have shown a modest tendency to growth in the context of economic crisis and union decline. However, this growth is not enough to dispute the hegemony of the major social-democratic unions, the CCOO and UGT. These unions have had to face the challenge of splits and tendencies toward internal disputes (they are only significant today for two reasons: their small size in terms of membership, and their internal direct democratic structure that favors the expression of opposition). Other important challenges are the extension of subcontracting of big firms in which they have representatives, and the difficulties to reach the precarious workers of these externalized firms. On the other hand, these unions have shown a great capacity to connect with social movements, developing convergences and spreading their ideas beyond the limited sphere of action of their membership. As a result, we may conclude that Spain's strong history of anarcho-syndicalism translates nowadays into the capacity of various radical unions for mobilizing and coordinating with other social movements rapidly, in the absence of any substantial economic or political conflict. Such horizontal and transversal political horizontal is mirrored, nevertheless, in the multiple difficulties they face when generating lasting organizational structures that can build up strong solidarity mechanisms or, that is, when these anarcho-syndicalist unions have not yet become effective organizations in the daily empowerment of the Spanish working class more generally.

'Counter-power' unionism in the Basque Country and Galicia

The Galician Confederación Intersindical Galega (CIG) and the Basque unions Euskal Langileen Alkartasuna (ELA), Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (LAB) and Ezker Sindikalaren Koordinakundea (ESK) have generated a landscape of 'counter-

gathers conservative and business unions from different European countries). In addition, there are some minor and fragmented expressions of radical unionism operating in certain industries, firms or territories, some of them focusing on precarious labour, such as the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores de Call Center (STCC) in call centers. The database of the Portuguese ministry showed that there were 490 unions in 2010, but most of them were not active or were extremely weak (Fulton, 2013).

There is another feature in Portuguese unionism that explains the shape and possibilities for radical unionism: the conflictual character of the CGTP-IN, in contrast to the more moderate behaviour of the UGT. Different to the Italian CGIL and the Spanish CCOO (Comisiones Obreras), the CGTP-IN has traditionally held a critical approach to social dialogue and has succeeded in taking in militants from different factions of the Left (in spite of the clear influence of the Communist Party). The relatively confrontational strategy of the CGTP-IN can explain partially the lack of other competing independent radical unions in the country. Since it is a space where radical identities have room for expression and action, militants do not feel the need to create new union structures.

After 2008 the Portuguese industrial relations system experienced a profound process of liberalization that has been eroding collective bargaining and unions' power (Távora, 2019). Despite the economic recovery after 2011, collective bargaining and union power were not restored. In this context, the CGTP-IN has experienced a process of radicalization from 2008, adopting a counterpower strategy in response to the neoliberal offensive and austerity measures, leading to a greater distancing from the neo-corporatist practices of the UGT (Estanque et al., 2017). Radicalization, however, has only affected profoundly a limited number of structures of the union (Stoleroff, 2014). In addition, unorganized actors affected by austerity policies launched a set of protests between

2011 and 2014 in which Portuguese unions lost the monopoly of social and industrial action. Massive protests on 12 March 2011 of the so-called 'Desperate Generation', on 15 October 2011 under the slogan 'United for a Global Change and the 'Screw the Troika!' protests in 2012 and 2013, following the example of the Spanish *indignados* and the Occupy movement, were not organized by the trade union movement, but their impact on public opinion and the political landscape favoured the rise of strike action in that period: major unions, especially the CGTP-IN, called for several general strikes against cutbacks and austerity policies. In the context of a decline of global protests, the 2015 general elections in Portugal gave the government to a coalition of social-democratic and leftist parties, and, similar to other European countries, social and industrial conflict decreased dramatically.

Anarcho-syndicalism and independentist unionism in Spain

Spanish social history and the union plurality that characterizes the national context of labour relations has favoured the survival of both an anarcho-syndicalist tradition and several sovereigntist unions. In the milieu of flexible capitalism and labour deregulation, radical unions in Spain have opposed neo-corporatist practices and have succeeded (although in different degrees) to adopt a counter-power strategy, emphasizing strike action and mobilizing 'hard to organize' workers beyond the workplace. The 2008 financial crisis was an opportunity for the expansion of these radical forms of trade unionism.

have a very limited membership (no more than 1000). On the other hand, the CNT launched its own international in 2018, the International Workers Confederation (CIT in Spanish), together with unions from Germany (FAU), Italy (USI) and other countries. Despite the splits, CNT-CIT has maintained its membership (5000 approximately), and has been able to carry out significant labour struggles involving several dozens and hundreds of workers, such as Alumansa, a firm in the metal sector in Zaragoza, the meat industry in Valencia or public servants in Galiza. Today both unions have a hostile relationship with each other.[6]

Solidaridad Obrera has also experienced significant growth in recent years. In the last five years, membership has grown from 800 to 2200. This union has also expanded to new territories, industries and firms. It has recruited members and achieved representation in the Metro of Barcelona, Renfe (a public railway firm), the port of Valencia (with an important group of stevedores), street cleaning (with representatives in the cities of Madrid, Alicante and Alcorcon), telemarketing and public administration (mainly in several municipal administrations and public hospitals). Part of their growth is due to their having recruited a group of workers that were deceived by other unions, many coming from the CGT, but also from the CNT in the case of the public healthcare service of Castilla la Mancha, and the Coordinadora de Trabajadores del Mar, in the case of the dockers of Valencia (see Fernández-Rodriguez et al., 2014 for a description of this union). This union has also been very active in several campaigns and coalitions for a variety of issues, such as against state repression, in defence of public transportation and solidarity action with unemployed workers.

[6] The debates about significant labour conflicts and about organizational internal conflicts and splits can be found in internet forums, especially at libcom.org

cent of representatives required in order to be regarded as most representative and, consequently, to be part of the spaces of social partnership at a national scale. Part of this growth has been located in Catalonia, where the CGT has expanded substantially in recent years, probably taking advantage of the climate of social unrest due to the incarceration of sovereigntist politicians after the independence referendum of 1 October in Catalonia[5] (Della Porta et al., 2019).

The CNT continued its path of reinforcing its industrial action that began at its tenth Congress of 2010 in Córdoba. It proposed hiring the professional services of a technical office formed of lawyers and economists, enhancing membership training, and focusing efforts on recruiting members and designating representatives in as many workplaces as possible. As a result, the CNT experienced moderate growth. Nonetheless, part of the local branches disagreed with these strategic orientations, accusing the leadership of a 'lack of democracy' and denouncing the 'reformist' and 'bureaucratic' turn of the union. This led to a series of splits or exits of several local branches. The relationship with other national unions within their international alliance, namely the International Workers Association (IWA), such as the Russian KRASS and the Polish ZSP, deteriorated, and the CNT was expelled from the IWA, accused of not paying its dues and of attempting to create a 'parallel international'. In 2017 several expelled unions of the CNT met in Villalonga (Valencia), creating CNT-AIT despite the lack of agreements among the participants. This new union has a dozen local branches, and is the recognized section of the IWA in Spain, with a central office in Granada. However, it does not have strong coordination, nor a website, propaganda or union action. CNT-AIT groups

[5] For more information about the growth of the CGT in Catalonia in recent years, see this statement on the anarchist website alasbarricadas.org: alasbarricadas.org

Anarcho-syndicalist struggles in twenty-first-century Spain

Recent developments in Spanish radical unionism have shown both the legacy of anarcho-syndicalism and its difference from new collective actors. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalist tradition is mainly manifested in radical unions such as the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the National Confederation of Labour (CNT) and Solidaridad Obrera (Workers Solidarity). These organizations are the heirs of the historical CNT, restructured during the 1970s (Romanos, 2010), but split during the 1980s into several unions, each with a different way of understanding its anarchist inspiration (Fernández Rodriguez et al., 2014). The issue of union elections was the main evident source of dispute, but there were also other ideological, generational and strategic causes (Vadillo, 2004; González Pérez, 2017). The CNT, with approximately 5000 members, refuses to participate in shop-floor elections, which implies inter-union competitiveness for getting representatives in workplaces and firms. Its militants believe that organizing only around 'union sections' – that is, a legally recognized structure where only union members are represented and that can designate their own representatives – makes their union model more consistent with anarchist politics and, consequently, can prevent the demobilizing consequences of unitary representation that is achieved through union elections (Roca, 2015).

CGT, born from a set of splits from the CNT in the 1970s and 1980s, has a more pragmatic approach, accepting participation in union elections. As a result, it claims to have today 100,000 members and to be the fourth biggest general union in Spain, very far from the two majority unions, the CCOO and UGT, and close to the USO.[4] The CGT is especially strong in transport, communications (with representatives in Telefon-

[4] For a historical account of the USO, see Bermúdez et al. (2019).

ica and many call centre companies) and automobile industries (with representatives in firms such as General Motors, SEAT, Renault, Nissan, Volkswagen and Ford). It also has a significant number of representatives in other industries such as cleaning, public administrations, banks, and healthcare and education industries. Solidaridad Obrera, born from a split from CNT and CGT in Madrid, opted for letting members of union sections decide whether to participate in union elections or not. This last union claims to have 2200 members, most of them in the Metro of Madrid, in which they organized various wild-cat strikes well before the crisis.

During the first years after the economic crisis of 2007, most Spanish unions, including anarcho-syndicalist ones, focused on countering redundancy plans, 'employment regulations' and governmental cutbacks (Köhler et al., 2013). Radical unions backed the general strikes in 2010 and 2012, fostered by the hegemonic unions of the CCOO and UGT. However, major unions held an ambivalent position, combining general strikes and protests with attempts to restore social dialogue – what has been called a 'boxing and dancing' strategy (Luque-Balbona and González-Begega, 2014). During this period the 15M or *indignados* movement emerged, which showed social discomfort with the economic situation and the lack of response of most political and social institutions, including trade unions (Castells, 2013; Fernández-Rodriguez et al., 2014). This new social movement was born initially outside radical traditions and gathered thousands of previously depoliticized young people who took the lead. Participant adults and veteran militants who had a previous political background had a secondary role.

Nonetheless, after 2012, the 15M movement experienced a gradual turn toward what has been defined as a 'materialist character' (Roca and Díaz-Parra, 2017). This turn implied an increasing interest in economic, housing and labour issues, and, consequently, entailed a convergence with – at least

a part of – the labor movement. The affinity between the anarchist inspiration of Spanish radical unions and the main features of the 15M favored a convergence between the 15M and anarcho-syndicalist unions. This convergence manifested mainly in a massive support for street demonstrations and action, but not necessarily a greater capacity to reach and organize workers in firms and workplaces. The new context of social protest and economic recession also favoured a climate of convergence among radical unions. Hence, coalitions of radical unions, civil society organizations and 15M assemblies have played a key role in the collective action against austerity policies. Numerous mobilizations from 2012 reflect this convergence between radical unionism and the *indignados*. During the general strikes of 2012, for example, the coalitions of 15M and smaller radical unions, such as the CGT, CNT and Solidaridad Obrera, had a massive attendance (Roca et al., 2018). After 2015, social mobilization began to decline, at the same time that a new leftist political party, Podemos, was created in order to concur to elections to the European Parliament. As Podemos and electoral politics began to dominate the public debate, radical unions continued their work at the shop-floor level.

The CGT has experienced moderate growth in recent years. In the union elections in the period between January 2015 and January 2019, this anarcho-syndicalist union amounted to 2 per cent of all the union representatives in the country, achieving the sum of 5435 representatives (CCOO, 2019). In contrast, in 2012 the CGT had 4805 representatives, 1.6 per cent of the total representatives in Spain (Fundación Primero de Mayo, 2014). Whereas the USO maintained its 10,900 representatives and the CCOO and UGT decreased from 11,721 and 107,459, to 96,249 88,198 respectively, the CGT showed a modest increase both in the number of representatives and its percentage of the global number of representatives. In spite of this moderate growth, this anarcho-syndicalist union is still very far from the 10 per