

Social Movement Unionism

Concept: Social Movement Unionism

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Description One of the most important characteristics of the process of globalization has been the incorporation of "flexible production" and Post-Fordism. This process, following the precepts of "neoclassical economics," tends to strengthen the interests of capital undermining the sovereignty of states to protect the rights of workers and other disadvantaged social sectors.

New trade unions, with different characteristics, have arisen in the South to counter the effects of new flexible and competitive labour policies that have caused high unemployment in those countries. Traditional unions can no longer represent displaced workers. Therefore, trade unions have looked for means of representation and mobilization which represent citizens' interests by complementing and expanding class issues. These unions involve not only the workers but also the growing number of informal workers in the labour market and other sectors of the population that are not "wage earners."

Social movement unionism is different from traditional trade unionism because it not only fights for the rights of workers within the workplace but also struggles for the social, economic, and political rights of non-workers (students, anti-poverty groups, neighbourhood-based organizations, women's groups, indigenous federations, the unemployed, and the retired) who experience the effects of unemployment and poverty. Social movement unions participate actively in the international scene, regionally and internationally, where they share their visions and strategies in opposition to neo-liberalism and propose an alternative vision of globalization in the World Social Forum. In order to undertake the challenge of making economic revitalization compatible with democratization at the national and international level it is imperative to consider labour and social movements as essential participants in economic policy and bearers of democratic politics.