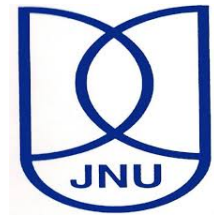




Call for Papers
XII Global Labour University Conference, 2017
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, New Delhi



Reincarnation or Death of Neoliberalism?

The rise of market authoritarianism and its challenges for labour

The Global Labour University is pleased to announce a call for papers for the 2017 conference on “Reincarnation or Death of Neoliberalism? The rise of market authoritarianism and its challenges for labour” to be held in New Delhi from 4 to 6 October 2017.

For three decades the rise of globalization commanded wide support as being necessary, desirable and, in any case, inevitable. Government after government, including those led by social democratic or socialist parties, accepted the imperatives of free capital markets, free trade, global production networks and flexible labour markets. The financial crises of 2008 shook the intellectual dominance, but not the institutional architecture of neoliberalism. Indeed, a new wave of structural adjustment and austerity was imposed on countries that had lost competitiveness. On the other hand, critical voices in the political mainstream became more frequent. Within the IMF, OECD and World Bank inequality as well as volatile and under-regulated financial markets were admitted to be problematic. Piketty’s “Capital in the Twenty-First Century” became a bestseller. The confidence in the rationality of financial markets was shattered.

However, the apparent failures of the current globalization regime are most successfully exploited by nationalistic-authoritarian movements promising greater prosperity and fairness within nations by taking a more aggressive stance towards others. Movements mobilizing against “unfair” competition from other countries or foreign migrants command considerable working class support. Wide ranging, radical and often incomprehensible and demagogic policies deliver a unifying and mobilizing message by taking recourse to traditional values in a rather aggressive and exclusive fashion. Affirmative action for disadvantaged social groups or castes, gender equality, ethnic or religious minorities, government regulation, political correctness, migrants, or cultural liberalism in general are cultivated as favourite hate objectives of the disgruntled and successfully blended with promises to make the nation great again.

Today, it is unclear how the interests of global capital and the rise of authoritarian but popular leaders might reconcile and what that will imply for workers’ rights, equity, liberal democracy, cultural diversity and respect for minorities. Will it by and large result in usual neoliberalism complimented with a different rhetoric and some symbolic but marginal policy changes, or are there more far-reaching systemic changes in the making? Assuming that whatever happens will be just another reincarnation of “old neo-liberalism” carries the risk to underestimate the implications the emerging new configurations.

It is an open question what such a new configuration might imply for labour. While some of the more interventionist economic ideas advocated by the protagonists of economic nationalism seem to be similar to long standing criticism of the current globalization regime, the authoritarian “anti-globalization” agenda is not accompanied with policies trying to make national societies fairer and more inclusive, or addressing the environmental challenges of globalization. And the agenda has little sympathy for workers’ rights and organized labour. Rather, the agenda seems to aim at a new national project combining close ties between business and the state with a mobilizing set of excluding values to build an intolerant majority. This should be particularly seen in terms of the threats against migrant labour which face undue hardships within nations.

Labour faces the enormous challenge of simultaneously responding to the current globalization regime marked by growing inequality, continuing environmental degradation, global capital mobility, exploitative global supply chains, persistent high levels of informal employment, and growing precariousness through rapid digitalization. At the same time, labour must now respond to the rise of a national-authoritarian, anti-globalization wave. The conference will discuss these challenges under a number of sub-themes:

1. Socially and economically just alternatives. The last decades saw the inclusion of more and more countries in the globalized economy while excluding many people from the benefits of this process. Parallel to the rise of free trade and globalization in general, income polarization as well as informal and precarious employment went up in many countries. Rural livelihoods are most vulnerable to climate change and often further marginalized through the impact of highly concentrated global agro-businesses. Migrants, women, ethnic minorities, and workers from lower castes are disproportionately represented among the poor and excluded. Becoming part of the losing bottom is a widespread fear among those slightly better off and partly translates in resentment against the already marginalized and poor. How can trends towards informalisation and precariousness be reversed? Which policies, including labour market regulations and social policies, can lead to the transition from informal to formal employment and increase the level of protection for the increasing number of workers lacking access to fundamental rights in law or practice? What are policies and strategies for sustainable rural development? How can countries through national and international policies maintain and regain policy space for inclusive societies? What are successful experiences or strategies to overcome divisions between different groups within the wider working class? What are experiences or strategies for labour to build broader support for an agenda for positive social transformation?

2. Global supply chains and implications for labour: Mobility of capital and free trade around the globe have resulted in the creation of global supply chains. They are at the heart of the current form of globalisation. They have broken down the old international division of labour and shifted substantial parts of industrial production to countries outside the OECD. However, this process did not raise the wages in the ‘global south’ in line with productivity growth due to the vast labour reserves located there. Moreover, this process put a check on the ‘northern’ wages by the threat of moving abroad. With monopsonistic buying practices by lead firms in many global supply chains, downstream firms operating on narrow margins have decentralized the production process, often hiring precarious workers including home based workers at depressed wages. It has often made informal economy workers the poorest and most flexible at the end of global value production. What policy changes nationally and internationally are required to overcome the exploitive features of global supply chains? What is the potential of international labour standards and of human rights due diligence obligations for business? How can basic labour standards, living wages and development objectives be met? How should such workers, dispersed across the globe, build struggles to resist such exploitations? How should labour create and maintain international workers’ unity while faced with competing interests?

3. Changing technology and the world of work: Rapidly changing technology has greatly assisted globalization of capital. The reduction of communication and transport costs as well as the further compartmentalization of work allowed for the dispersion of an integrated labour process around the world. Global outsourcing of work has effectively led to the development of a ‘twenty-four-hour economy’. The same process has made working conditions more precarious: stretching the number of consecutive hours of work – often eroding the fixed boundaries between home and work (a process that is biased against women workers, since responsibilities at home are unevenly distributed between sexes). Will rapid digitalization allow for radically new forms of work organisation and a reshaping of production networks? Crowd work, 3D printing, online-shopping, education, and medical services are just a few examples of new global trends that have the potential for great positive and negative changes in the world of work and in people’s lives. They carry the risks of increasing labour surplus further in poor countries and it creates new possibilities to circumvent labour regulations and undermine regular employment relations. What is the likely impact of the new technologies of the global division of labour and the structure of labour markets? What are promising initiatives to shape this new modernization wave? What is the role of labour market regulations and what are successful strategies of these new workers to represent their interest? How do trade unions need to evolve in order to broadly represent these diverse and dispersed groups of workers nationally and internationally?

4. Building Movements against Neoliberalism and Neo-nationalism: The neoliberal model favouring so disproportionately the one percent while promising ‘trickle down’ to the rest faces a crisis of legitimacy. The promise of decisive action by a strong leader, rhetorical elite bashing and aggressive identity policies based on nationalism, ethnicity or religion prove more popular than a technocratic defence of the flawed and unfair status quo as a reality without any alternative. The current realignment of social forces in societies sees substantial parts of the working class supporting (economic) nationalism, trade regulations, more authoritarian leadership and cultural conservatism. However, it remains to be seen whether these nationalistic, anti-globalization slogans will really take on the business and financial interest that are a driving force behind the today’s liberal globalization model. The rise of strongly divisive policies along ethnic, caste, gender and religious lines as well as increased national rhetoric are incompatible with trade union concepts of unity and solidarity. Many trade unions are faced with government policies and regulations that make it more difficult to organize and represent workers or to take strike actions. How can the rise of neo-nationalism and strong authoritarian leaders be explained? What is the impact of these policy developments on the social fabric of societies? What are new policies of neo-nationalism and where does neoliberal continuity prevail? What are the consequences of the likely end of the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) for the global trade system and for labour in particular? What are trade union responses to these new and not so new challenges? What are examples and strategies to maintain and enlarge trade union solidarity within and across nations in this political, economic and cultural environment?

We welcome submissions for papers on any of these themes. While we encourage submission of papers that broadly fit into the themes, we will also consider papers that do not fit directly into one of the themes as long as they address the broad focus of the conference. Please indicate which theme your paper addresses with your abstract submission. The GLU encourages policy orientated research and therefore welcomes submissions that not only analyse problems, but also offer some policy initiatives and solutions for debate. Please send a one-page abstract (which includes your methodological approach) by March 20, 2017 to jnugluconf2017@gmail.com.