



Call for Papers

**VII Global Labour University Conference,
South Africa, 2011
“The Politics of Labour and Development”
September 28 to 30, 2011
Johannesburg, South Africa**

The Global Labour University is pleased to announce a call for papers for the 2011 conference on “The Politics of Labour and Development” to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa from September 28 to 30, 2011.

The global economic crisis has had a particularly hard-hitting impact on working people, their families and communities throughout the world. What is more, they also face an environmental crisis that is closely linked to the economic crisis. Together, these crises have intensified the dispossession of the commons (including both local resources and public goods such as health and education), the informalisation of labour, unemployment, national and global social inequality, and the “slummification” of cities. Declining biodiversity, climate change and pollution are evidence of the impact of the crisis on the planet itself. Environmental degradation threatens viable livelihoods and endangers public health. Meanwhile the market imperatives get defining power over daily life, business interests tighten their stranglehold on the state logic and power is transferred to supranational institutions with limited democratic accountability, simultaneously narrowing electoral choices, and increasingly restrictions on protest.

Labour, as a key social force of the excluded majority, has a crucial role to play in countering the destructive logics of capitalism. The politics of labour is about altering the balance of power away from capital and unelected bureaucracies toward labour and broader society. The politics of labour is also about overcoming the multiple relations of power and oppression, including the economic, political, gender, ethnic *and* cultural, that contribute to and reproduce the power of the few and the subordination of the many. This has the following dimensions:

- 1) **The workplace imperative:** Labour's attempts to reverse the declining wage share and extract as much of the social surplus created through mobilisation for higher wages and better working conditions, as can be seen in the recent strike wave in South Africa and other parts of the world. This is especially important as rising inequality has devastating effects on society, as more and more people are pushed to margins of production and consumption patterns. For example, this includes issues of the distribution of productivity growth, minimum wages and basic income grants as well as policy issues of taxation and redistribution.
- 2) **New forms of power or leverage:** With rising unemployment and increasing numbers of workers pushed into precarious forms of work, traditional sources of power are eroded, but new forms of power are being explored, often by the most marginalized and sectors traditionally ignored by labour movements. Labour's links to other social forces is crucial here. This also raises questions about who constitutes the working class, with wider understandings of labour increasingly finding salience in innovative movements around the world. The development of transnational linkages and networks is also an important dimension to the development of new forms of power and leverage.
- 3) **The policy imperative:** Labour's attempts, often in alliance with other groups in civil society, to pressure governments to increase the social wage (public health, education, transport, housing, etc.), increase employment and change economic (and slowly environmental) policy accordingly. For example, what would a "green new deal" look like? We also encourage papers that look at the conversion of industrial production into alternative forms of production and consumption as well as papers looking at ecological issues.

What are the most effective ways to develop pro-working class policy? Corporatism seems to have spread, rather than declined, in the neo-liberal era: what is its balance sheet?

- 4) **Political parties, alliances and trade union organizations, and political power:** Labour's attempts to directly alter the balance of state power, either
 - a. through alliances with ruling political parties,
 - b. through the reorganization of trade union organizations and strategies,
 - c. through the development of alternative organizations and alliances with other movements in civil society, or
 - d. through building movements that refuse to participate in the state, but are willing to pressure it for reforms.

This raises questions about the role of labour—as a reforming force, as a legitimating function that hinders more radical challenges to state power, or as a central actor in building an alternative to the destructive logic of capitalist development. The nature of political alliances and forms of mobilizing are vital issues that are being experimented on in various

regions of the world (e.g., many movements in Latin America, South Korean marginalized workers, etc.). It also raises questions about international approaches to global governance.

- 5) **The economic imperative.** Within the neoliberal framework, competitiveness becomes more aggressive and self-destructing through currency manipulation, quantitative easing, wage dumping, trade barriers, devaluation etc. Is there space for economic policy nationally and internationally that avoids the disadvantages of a competitive race to the bottom or a retreat in isolated economic nationalism?

- 6) **Alternative forms of production, consumption and redistribution:** This raises questions about what are alternative forms of production and consumption. For example, worker cooperatives, microcredit/microfinance projects (including its problems for informal sector workers), local agricultural production, and solidarity economy alternatives have emerged around the world.

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. The GLU encourages policy orientated research and therefore welcomes submissions that not only analyses the problem, but also offer some policy initiatives and solutions for debate.

Please send a one page abstract (which includes your methodological approach) by January 30, 2011 to Pulane Ditlhake at Glu.SouthAfrica@wits.ac.za and Michelle Williams at michelle.williams@wits.ac.za