

DESK RESEARCH ITALY

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Introduction

The current state of the Italian labor movement and trade unions reflects a broader trend that is being experienced by trade unions globally (Bryson et al. 2011; Visser 2019; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013; Bernaciak et al. 2014) and at the European level (Baccaro and Howell 2017). The increasing globalization of the economy, especially the shift towards a neoliberal model, has had a profound impact on the functioning of trade unions. The financialization of the economy, the decentralization and globalization of production systems, the liberalization of labor markets, and the weakening of the state and government have all contributed to the decline of trade unions.

The decline in trade union membership and bargaining power (Leonardi and Pedersini 2018), as well as their reduced role in decision-making, are the direct result of these changes in the economic and political landscape. Previously, differences in varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001), welfare systems (Esping-Andersen 1990), interest representation (Frege and Kelly 2004), and party systems (Golden 1986) had differentiated the impact of the global pressure, but in recent years, there has been a trend towards convergence towards a similar neoliberal model (see Lehndorff, Dribbusch and Schulten 2018).

Despite these challenges, the Italian trade union system appears to be more resilient than in other countries. This may be due to factors such as the history of strong trade unionism in Italy, the unique characteristics of the Italian labor market, or the continued influence of the trade unions in Italian society and politics (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming)

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1. Development of trade unions in historical perspective

1.1. *Historical overview: main trends in the Italian trade unions landscape*

The history of Italian trade unions dates back to the late 19th century, when small unions focusing on craft workers and mutualist associations linked to socialist and anarchist movements emerged, particularly in the North of Italy (Agosti et al. 1971). In the early 20th century, the labor movement grew and expanded with the creation of new unions and the establishment of political parties such as the Italian Socialist Party. In 1906, the socialists created the first mass confederal trade union, the Italian General Confederation of Labor (CGdL), by regrouping around 700 small unions and with about 250,000 members (Pepe 1971).

In 1912, the anarchist component of the CGdL established their own independent confederation, the Italian Trade Union (USI) (Careri 1991). Despite facing significant challenges in the 1920s and 1930s, including government repression and the rise of fascism, unions continued to organize and advocate for workers' rights, and played a crucial role in the resistance against the fascist regime during World War II (Turone 1973)

After the war, Italian trade unions re-emerged with the reorganization of the socialist, communist, and Catholic mass parties. The Unitary CGIL (Confederation) was established in 1944, as a result of a pact signed between the DC (Christian Democracy), the PCI (Italian Communist Party), and PSI (Italian Socialist Party). In 1950, a group affiliated with the Christian Democratic party left the CGIL to form a separate trade union confederation (CISL), and social democrats (who had split from the PSI) did the same by creating their own confederation (UIL) (Agosti et al. 1971). Although these three confederations have dominated the post-war trade union landscape in Italy, other trade unions have also emerged. In 1950, former Fascists who had reorganized around the neo-fascist MSI party created the CISNAL confederation (which has since merged with the UGL - <https://www.ugl.it/chi-siamo/>), under the leadership of Giuseppe Landi, a former member of the National Fascist Party (Mascagni 2011).

At the end of the 1950s, another confederation emerged as an attempt to create a trade union that was independent from political parties. Despite the influence of the Christian Democracy leading government and its mass membership, trade unions were marginalized in the two decades following the war. However, in the second half of the 1960s, trade unions, particularly the CGIL and its metalworkers' federation FIOM, organized a series of strikes and mass demonstrations in the "hot autumn" of 1969, which reinforced their bargaining power and helped shape the country's economic and social policies. This was instrumental in the creation of the country's welfare state (Crouch and Pizzorno 1978). As Pedersini (2019, 337) writes: "During the early 1970s, tripartite relations were not institutionalized, but the mobilization capacity of trade unions and their link with them main parties in the governing coalitions and in the opposition alike made them important actors in the political arena".

In the 1980s, the Italian trade union landscape became even more pluralistic with the emergence of another independent union confederation, Confsal (<https://www.confsal.it/chi-siamo/confsal-come-e-perche/>), which aimed to overcome the limitations of "ideological" Italian trade unionism. If the main trade unions tried to establish more institutionalized tripartite assets, the relationships with governments remained weak and unstable (Carrieri and Donolo 1987). Moreover, they faced divisions over their strategies and policies in response to the economic crisis and the rise of neoliberalism. This led to a decline in their ability to gain reforms and political leverage through mobilization, as evidenced by the "March of the Forty Thousand" in 1980, where 40,000 FIAT managers and white-collar workers marched in support of FIAT owners and against the trade union's efforts to protest against planned collective layoffs. The event is considered a symbolic defeat of the workers' movement in Italy (Golden 1987).

The division among the three main trade unions was also reflected in the bargaining arena, with an important exception. At the decentralized company level, a "hidden micro concertation" (Regini, 1995) took place, characterized by pragmatism and cooperation (Pedersini, 2019). During this phase, other trade unions, mainly rank-and-file and sector-based, emerged, most of which had a radical, participatory, and leftist orientation.

Examples include COBAS, founded in the 1980s and based in the educational sector, CUB (1987), primarily in the public sector, GILDA (1989) in education, USB (2010) in transportation and education, and SLAI COBAS (2007) in the metalworking sector. These grassroots unions are strong among workers in the logistics sector (especially the Si.Cobas, established in 2010 after a split in the SLAI Cobas), mostly migrants, and are active in social movements mobilization (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming, 7). This hyper-pluralistic trade union landscape, combined with the pluralistic scenario of the employers' representative organizations, makes the Italian case an extreme example of a pluralistic system of representation (Pedersini and Welz, 2014; Pedersini, 2019).

However, this situation is moderated by the dominant role of the three main confederations on the workers' side and Confindustria on the employers' side in the collective bargaining system. A tripartite concertation process was established to restore macroeconomic stability (Baccaro et al., 2003; Regini, 1997) and trade unions were involved in reforms to the pension system, wage restraints, and collective bargaining, resulting in the current two-tier bargaining system (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming). This system has been referred to as "centrally coordinated decentralization" as the social partners are able to coordinate local bargaining (Pedersini, 2019). In 1993, a tripartite agreement formalized the introduction of the "Unitary Trade Union Workplace Representation Structure" (RSU) as the general workplace representation body (Pedersini, 2019, 341). This reinforces the quasi-tripartite aspect, as the "RSU is elected by all workers at an establishment on trade union lists presented by the organisations' signatories to the industrial agreement applied in the workplace and by other unions with at least 5 per cent support in the relevant establishment" (ibid.). Interestingly, the main trade unions' bargaining power increased as political parties dissolved due to corruption trials, but only to mitigate substantial losses (Baccaro et al., 2003).

The changing party system scenario, however, left the trade unions without potential allies on the center-right side. This, combined with the substantial bipolarity of the second republic, resulted in the weakening of the tripartite bargaining structure. The Berlusconi-led center-right governments of 2001 and 2008 reintroduced government unilateralism on

economic issues, including cuts to the welfare system and liberalization of the labour market (Colombo and Regalia 2016). The 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity policies further diminished the bargaining power of the trade unions, which resorted to protest mobilization as a functional alternative (Morlino and Raniolo 2017). This occurred less frequently under center-left supported governments (Andretta 2018).

a) Membership and density

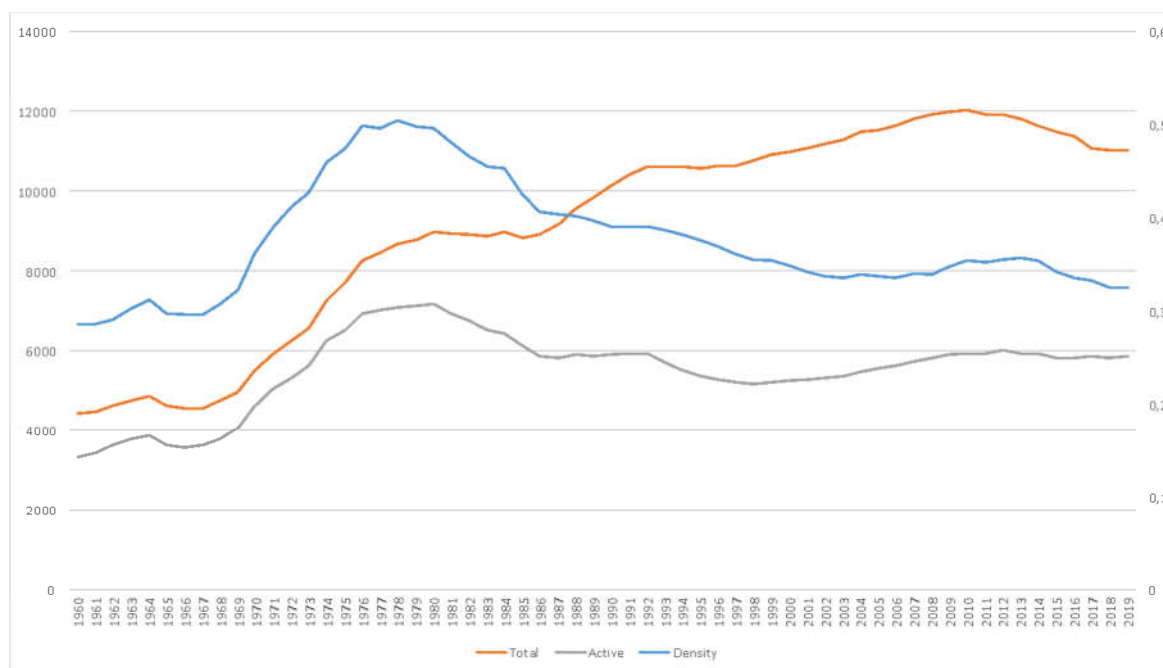
As for the consistency and trends of Italian trade union membership, opinions vary. A report by the EU-funded research project on trade unions and youth (YouUnion 2013², p. 13) states that the available data on membership consistency and trends are limited and declining. However, another paper argues that membership is solid in Italy, contrary to other European countries, and that there are signs of revitalization in the trade union landscape (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

In comparison to other European countries, Italy has a relatively high membership rate (Visser 2019: 59-61), and despite fluctuations and reductions in collective bargaining power, the membership numbers have remained stable over the past two decades (Leonardi and Pedersini, 2018, forthcoming). The three main confederations in Italy, CGIL, CISL, and UIL, have approximately 12 million members, including retirees (Leonardi and Pedersini, 2018, forthcoming).

The high number of retirees has contributed to the total membership composition, but the data for active members and their density have remained stable over the past 20 years (Figure 1, Table 1). Additionally, the hyper-pluralistic structure of Italian trade unions means that the "official data" only covers the main confederations and does not account for other confederations and independent trade unions.

²https://moodle.adaptland.it/pluginfile.php/20457/mod_resource/content/1/03_italy.pdf

Figure 1. Main Trade Unions Confederations Membership and Net Density 1960-2019



Source: Our elaboration from ICTWSS Database

Table 1. Trends of the principal characteristics of the Italian main trade union landscape

| | 1980 | 2000 | 2010 | 2019 |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Total trade Union Membership (retired excluded) | 7.189.000 | 5.194.500 | 5.920.900 | 6.488.400 |
| Share of Women | 35.0% | 38.3% | n.a. | 45.0% |
| Density | 35.6% | 34.8% | 35.1% | 32.5% |
| Number of confederations | 5 | 7 | ? | 8 |
| Number of federations | 82 | 52 | ? | 47 |
| Number of independent confederations | 2 | 4 | ? | 5 |
| Collective bargaining coverage (Industry level) | 80% | 80% | 80% | 80% |
| CBP (decentralized agreements) | | 30% | 30% | 30% |

| | | | | |
|---|-------|----|----|------|
| Days not worked for strikes per 1,000 workers | 1.135 | 58 | 68 | n.s. |
|---|-------|----|----|------|

Source: Leonardi and Pedersini (forthcoming), integrated by Pedersini (2019) and ICTWSS Database

The growing number of independent federations (Table 1) suggests that the number of members in Italy is underestimated, and with the inclusion of members from other unions, the union density in Italy could be close to 40% of all employees (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming, 9). However, there are concerns regarding the proportion of pensioners, the distribution of active members across economic sectors, with the public sector being more prevalent than the private sector - the density in the former is above 50% (Bordogna and Pedersini 2019) - and the representation of so-called atypical workers, mostly consisting of women, immigrants, and youth. Not only did the economic crisis result in job losses and reduced wages, making it harder for unions to attract and retain members, but the increase in non-standard forms of employment, such as temporary and part-time work, has made it more challenging for unions to organize and represent workers (Regalia 2012). Nevertheless, 'despite the difficulties, unions seem to have established a significant presence in some of the most challenging areas to organize: non-standard work and small enterprises. Federations representing non-standard workers had almost 240,000 members in 2019, or 3.6% of the overall membership, which is a substantial accomplishment' (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming, 9; see also Bordogna 2021).

c) Organization and internal democracy

The Italian Constitution supports trade unions by protecting workers' rights to participate (Article 40) and to strike (Article 46) in industrial relations. At the same time, it requires trade unions to be internally democratic (Article 39), a requirement that is considered to be met by many (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming). According to the Constitution, "the internal organization of trade unions must be democratic and decisions must be made by members through regular meetings or referendums."

The organizational structure of Italian trade unions is complex, combining different levels: the confederal level and the industrial level, which are in turn structured horizontally,

territorially, and vertically (Cocozza 2010). The internal organization of trade unions involves a hierarchical structure, with decisions being made at various levels of the organization. At the local level, union branches are responsible for representing the interests of workers in specific workplaces or regions, as stated in the constitution. These branches "elect delegates to represent them at the regional level. At the regional level, unions "elect delegates to attend conferences, where they debate and vote on important decisions, such as the election of regional leaders and the adoption of political positions on specific issues." Regional leaders are responsible for coordinating the activities of local branches and representing the interests of workers in their region. At the national level, the main confederations, such as CGIL, CISL, and UIL, hold annual congresses, where delegates from regional unions gather to make important decisions, such as the election of national leaders and the adoption of policies and positions on national issues. National leaders are responsible for coordinating the activities of the regional unions and representing the interests of workers at the national level. Decisions are made through democratic processes, with decisions at each level being made by a vote of the delegates present. The internal rules of the trade unions determine the exact procedures for voting and decision-making, but in general, the principle of one person, one vote is followed.

In addition to the hierarchical structure, Italian trade unions also have committees and commissions dedicated to specific industries or professions, such as the construction industry or the health sector. These committees and commissions allow unions to have a more specialized focus on the needs and interests of workers in specific industries, and to develop targeted policies and positions on specific issues.

One characteristic of the Italian confederal trade union organization is the existence of a separate federation for pensioners, which has gradually gained relative importance (Figure 1, Table 1). However, their membership strength does not translate into greater decision-making power, which is largely dominated by federations representing active members (for example, the pensioners' federation is not involved in wage collective agreements) (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

In the last thirty years, important organizational changes have taken place due to the pressures of a changing socio-economic and political environment and the increasing complexity of the functions of Italian trade unions (Regalia 2012; Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming). In addition to representing the interests of workers, they also provide political representation by promoting economic development, labor market policies, and promoting a general labor culture. Additionally, trade unions offer a wide range of services, such as employment services, tax assistance, legal guidance, assistance with individual disputes, pensions issues, etc. (Cocozza 2010).

Among the most significant changes, Regalia (2012) cites the introduction of the referendum to consult workers at the company level for the signing of industry-wide collective agreements in 1986. This was also used during the social pacts signed in the 1990s and 2007 (Baccaro et al., 2003; Regalia, 2012). The establishment of work councils for in-company representation was informally established in the early 1980s and formalized in the 1990s (RSU), and is considered key to the democratic renewal of Italian trade unions (Carrieri, 1995).

Additionally, the major trade unions have streamlined the federation level by grouping together in a more functional way (see Table 1), and established unions for atypical workers to respond to the challenge posed by the growing number of non-standard contracts in the Italian labor market (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

To this organizational landscape, one should add a different functioning of the organization and of the internal democracy of the numerous rank and files unions emerged since the 1980s (see above), which try to combine a classical associational model of democracy with direct representation at the company level.

1.2. Overview of collective bargaining in the given country, including information about but not limited to: coverage over the past 30 years

The history of collective bargaining in Italy can be traced back to the post-World War II period, when the Italian Labor Code was enacted in 1943, which established the framework for labor relations and provided for the negotiation of collective bargaining agreements

between employers and employees. During the 1950s and 1960s, under the increasing labour mobilization, the Italian labor market experienced significant growth and expansion, and collective bargaining became an increasingly important tool for determining working conditions and wages. During this period, many sectoral collective bargaining agreements were reached, covering a wide range of industries and sectors (Pedersini 2018).

In the 1990s and 2000s, collective bargaining in Italy underwent significant reforms, aimed at making the process more flexible and responsive to the needs of the labor market. The reforms included changes to the legal framework governing collective bargaining, as well as the introduction of new forms of negotiation and dispute resolution (see the Historical overview above).

The Berlusconi-led center-right governments of 2001 and 2008 brought back government control in economic issues, resulting in cuts to the labor market and welfare system. The 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity policies decreased the bargaining power of labor unions, causing them to rely on protest mobilization. This trend was less prevalent under center-left governments. Although a slight shift towards collaboration was observed during the Covid-19 pandemic, the involvement of labor unions in the National Recovery Plan was limited and they are now calling for greater consideration in future decisions.

As seen in Table 1, the coverage of collective bargaining has remained relatively stable over time, but this indicator conceals significant changes in key characteristics of Italian collective bargaining.

Pedersini (2019, p. 339) summarizes these changes by referring to five elements: 1) actors eligible for collective bargaining; 2) importance of bargaining levels; 3) the principle of favorability/possibilities for deviation; 4) collective bargaining coverage; and 5) extension mechanisms.

- 1) Eligible actors include all trade unions and employer associations, and no specific registration is necessary. However, cross-industry agreements have recently established rules for union representation, with the possibility of

extending them to employer associations. No legal requirements have been established.

- 2) Industrial agreements regulate minimum wage rates and are defined based on the inflation policy and normative conditions. Decentralized agreements handle the implementation and adaptation of industrial rules to local conditions, as well as performance-related pay which distributes productivity gains. However, the wage developments are now tied to inflation to maintain purchasing power; new opportunities for "opening clauses" (since 2009) were added through cross-industry agreements and industrial agreements have a coordinating role; and a legislative measure passed in 2011 during the debt crisis now permits deviation from industrial agreements and legislation through local deals, without specific coordination requirements.
- 3) No legal favourability principle exists, but coordination rules from collective agreements with weak enforcement are in place. Derogations are not permitted for minimum wage rates, protected by interpretation of the Italian Constitution's Article 36 on fair compensation. If Article 8 of Decree Law 138/2011 now sanctions the absence of a legal favourability principle; the protection of minimum wage rates remains unchanged.
- 4) Collective bargaining, as said, remains stable (Table 1)
- 5) Extension mechanisms have not been introduced, though the established interpretation of Article 36 of the Italian Constitution on fair compensation, in regards to minimum wage rates, recognizes collectively agreed minimum wage rates as the minimum pay level.

As Pedersini (2019, p. 355) writes: "Since the early 2000s, industrial relations in Italy have been marked by the partial erosion of the importance of the social partners in national policymaking; a change in the balance between industrial and company agreements, with more scope for decentralisation and potentially for derogations from higher-level deals; and a transformation of the content of collective agreements, with significant wage

moderation, a growing focus on work flexibility and performance-related pay, and the increasing prominence of contractual welfare benefits”.

According to Regalia and Regini (2018, 66-67): “Under the Berlusconi Government of 2008–2011, tripartite consultations were marked by a ‘refusal to accept vetoes’, which meant in practice that the government adopted a rather unilateral approach and that any agreement was extremely difficult to attain. The ‘technocratic’ Monti government, in office from mid-November 2011 until early 2013, also believed that vetoes were unacceptable, especially in the face of an international crisis that required prompt action...”. And, if centre-left governments have traditionally perceived as potential allies for trade unions, “times of crisis were considered incompatible with the ‘rites’ of social concertation, and this belief was also largely shared by the centre-left governments led by Enrico Letta (2013–2014), Matteo Renzi (2014–2016) and Paolo Gentiloni (2016–2018)”.

Collective bargaining is also threatened by the multiplication of autonomous unions at both the industrial and company level: according to Leonardi and Pedersini (forthcoming, p. 14), in 2021, “the national register of industry-wide agreements kept by the CNEL records 985 texts, compared with only 350 in 2008. Of these, barely one-third are signed by the federations affiliated to the three major confederations”. This seems not to lead to a less coverage power by the three main confederations, though: “Despite this multiplication of collective agreements signed by non-affiliated unions, only a minority are applied extensively, and all are signed by the most representative federations. Some 350 industry-wide agreements covered approximately 98 per cent of all employees at the end of 2019, while 60 per cent of all registered agreements are not even mentioned in the monthly social security declarations (INPS 2020)”.

1.3. The Covid 19 crisis impact on the union movement

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the Italian economy, leading to widespread job losses, reduced working hours, and a decline in business activity.

It is possible that the pandemic has led to a decrease in the absolute number of trade union members and in the membership density, although there is currently no recent data

available to support this claim. The impact on trade unions may have varied across different sectors.

Following recent insights, however, it seems that the pandemics have impacted trade unions in terms of collective bargaining power and relations and mobilization (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

In March 2020 workers went on strike to demand safer work conditions (De Sario et al. 2021). The following year, unions took action to protect employment and extend the ban on dismissals (eventually ended in July 2022), ultimately leading to a government supported joint union-employer agreement which commits companies to exhaust all available resources, including COVID-19 short-term work, before proceeding with layoffs (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

According to the CNEL 2021 report, the pandemics significantly changed the way collective bargaining is conducted: decentralized negotiations now prioritize the urgency to manage business closures, maintain essential services, protect individuals and ensure a safe recovery from the ongoing emergency. If government unilateralism was a defining feature of the last decade, a slightly reversing trend emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic in the management of its huge social and economic impacts (CNEL 2021, Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

An examination of recent company and territorial contracts reveals that the main themes addressed during the post-pandemic negotiation phase 2 are: a) rearranging work activities and implementing agile work; b) managing shared spaces and dealing with any COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace; c) setting up joint committees to oversee health and safety at work; d) providing training and information regarding direct and indirect risks of COVID-19. Additionally, seeking flexibility solutions has been considered a way to stimulate gradual employment recovery and help overcome the current crisis (CNEL 2021, chapter 8).

At the central level, it is worth mentioning that CNEL, INPS, labor and employers organizations have collaborated to create a "identity card" for national private sector labor contracts, with the goal of implementing a tool that will promote quality and uniformity in

negotiations (CNEL 2021, chapter 14). In the years of the pandemics, decentralized bargaining on workplace welfare and work-life balance increased, while in the craft industry, territorial negotiations have been centered on the implementation of bilateral tools (CNEL 2022, Chapter 8).

Despite this, Leonardi and Pedersini (forthcoming, 2) point out that the trade unions' involvement in the definition of the National Recovery Plan was disappointing, and the unions are now demanding to be taken much more seriously into consideration during the implementation phases.

2. Legal and political-economic context for trade unions

2.1. Legal framework for trade unions: representation and functioning of trade unions

The most relevant source of the regulatory and legal framework of trade unions is the Italian Constitution. Three main forces and cultural traditions of the Resistance (the Liberal one but also the mass and working class oriented, i.e. the Christian-Democratic and Marxist cultures) inspired the principles of the Republican Constitution (LaPalombara 1957). At the outset, this basic law contains some statements of principle. It is especially important that the first article of the Constitution begins with a reference to labour. It maintains that "Italy is a democratic republic founded on work". There could be references to 'freedom', 'law', 'fraternity', etc., but the precise choice of the concept of 'work' immediately shows to what extent work, but also workers and workers' associations in an extensive way, play a fundamental role in the Italian republic. Or at least in the political *milieu* that prevailed in the years immediately after the end of the Second World War (and after the winning partisan war against Nazi-Germany and the fascist collaborators).

Furthermore, among the first 12 articles of the Constitution (which represent the "fundamental principles" of the Republic), also article 4 refers to work, dictating that "The Republic recognizes the right to work for all citizens and promotes the conditions that make this right effective". Above all, the rest of the Constitution is divided into other parts: the first concerning rights and duties of citizens and the second one regarding the organization of the State. In the first part, a title is dedicated to economic relations. There

are many references to work and workers here. For example, article 35 says that “The Republic protects work in all its forms and applications. It takes care of the training and professional development of workers”.

Again, articles 36, 37, and 38 speak of rights relating to working conditions. In particular, they argue that the law must fix the maximum daily working time and the minimum age limit for young employees; every worker has the right to holidays and to weekly rests; workers cannot be differentiated on the basis of sex and that disabled people also have the right to work; the wage must be proportional to the quantity and quality of work performed; and, finally, that all the workers have the right to be assisted when they find themselves in a situation of injury, illness, disability and unemployment.

Article 39 fixes the basic framework for trade unions. First of all, it establishes that “the organization of trade unions is free”. However, the article states: “the law may oblige the registration of trade unions to local or central state offices”. This is the only requirement that can be asked of trade unions, but only trade unions with an internal democratic organization are eligible to be registered. Subsequently, the ‘registered’ (and officially recognised) unions are enabled to sign collective work contracts (on the proportional basis of their membership), which bind all the workers to whom the agreement is addressed. With this article, the Constitution clearly distinguishes recognised and registered trade unions from the not recognised ones: being the former able to sign collective contracts, which are valid for all the workers, i.e. also for those workers enlisted in unrecognised unions but also for the non-unionised workers. However, the reality is that no trade union has ever sought official recognition from the State. Neither the big three (CGIL, CISL and UIL) have ever expressed their intention to do so. Therefore, their real capability to sign collective agreements stems from the extent of their membership, rather than from any official acknowledgment by the State. Finally, the Constitution opens to the possibility of workers’ cooperation to companies’ management (article 46) and it attributes constitutional value to the strike, which is governed by specific laws (article 40).

Leaving aside the formal principles of the 1948 Republican Constitution and passing to analyse the consequences of ordinary legislation, we observe that work regulation has

undergone deep changes in the last 70 years. Until the mid-1980s, the legislation in force (overall law 230/1962 and overall the law 300/1970, better known as “Statute of workers”) clearly considered the normal contract of employment as indefinite, except in cases specified by legislation³. This was a great achievement in ensuring good working conditions for employees. Fixed-term contracts of employment were permitted only on the basis of special conditions, such as for seasonal jobs, for replacement of sick employees or those on maternity leave, and for extraordinary and occasional work. This situation has gradually changed towards a wider liberalisation of various kinds of fixed-term contracts and towards a reduction in the security of the same permanent positions. This change has been the result of several legislative interventions. The first one was law 56/1987, followed ten years later by the so called “Pacchetto Treu”⁴ approved by the centre-left government led by Romano Prodi.

In 2003, it was the turn of the centre-right executive led by Silvio Berlusconi, which approved Law 30/2003, also known as “Legge Biagi”.⁵ Other important changes towards greater liberalization of the job market were introduced in 2012 by law 92/2012, also known as “Riforma Fornero”⁶ and, in 2014-2016 by the composite reform called “Jobs Act” approved by the government led by the PD leader Matteo Renzi.⁷

a) Tripartism, bipartism, collective bargaining and resolution of collective labour disputes

Even if the labour market has hugely changed in the last 30 years, collective agreements continue to regulate all the aspects of the relationship between employers and employees,

³ De Matteis, Aldo, Accardo, Paola, and Giovanni Mammine, “National Labour Law Profile: Italy” in [https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/national-labour-law-profiles/WCMS_158903/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ifpdial/information-resources/national-labour-law-profiles/WCMS_158903/lang-en/index.htm) (accessed 18 January 2023)

⁴ This series of bills (number 196, 280 and 468 of 1997) were the approved under the stimulus of the Minister of Employment, Tiziano Treu.

⁵ Marco Biagi was an academician and a jurist of work law. He was involved in several research on the restructuring of job market in Italy. For this engagement in 2002 was killed by a terrorist commando.

⁶ Elsa Fornero was the minister of Employment and Social Affairs of technocratic government led by Mario Monti.

⁷ The so-called Jobs Act was a complex reform of the job market, which included a complex of 11 laws approved between 2014 and 2016.

excluding those that are regulated by law. These agreements can be of national level (*'contratto collettivo nazionale del lavoro'* / CCNL), but also of regional and local company level.

The collective agreement obtains force of law and it is mandatory for signing employers and employees, within their collective representation. The Constitution provides that only recognized trade unions can sign agreement, but since no one asked for recognition, the agreements are valid when the most representative unions have signed them. And these also are valid for the non-unionised workers.⁸

In Italy labour disputes are regulated by special employment courts, which are integrated in in the general civil court system but follow special procedure. Conciliation and out-of-court proceedings are permitted only if the employee agrees. There is not a procedure for collective disputes, except for the possibility, introduced by law 80/1998, for trade unions to appeal to the *Corte di Cassazione* (the highest court) for the correct interpretation of a collective agreement. Therefore, the negotiation and the bargaining between workers' unions and employers' associations are resolved through social and political dialogue and struggle.

b) *Rights for unionisation and strike*

Among the numerous collective actions that unions can use, strike represents one of the most important means. Its legitimacy is already mentioned in the Constitution and is regulated by several laws.

Legislation provides that when a strike in '*essential public services*' (which are related to certain Constitutional rights related to life, health, freedom, safety, freedom to circulate,

⁸ In 2021 of the 13.8 millions workers with a fixed contract, 13 millions workers are included within a national contract, while for 800 thousands the type of contract is not indicated. That means that around 94% of workers with a fixed term are included in a national contract. (see <https://www.bollettinoadapt.it/la-copertura-dei-ccnl-tra-narrazione-e-realta-nella-prospettiva-del-salario-minimo-legale/#:~:text=Nel%202021%2C%20per%2012.914.115,negli%20Uniemens%20di%20un%20CCNL.> Accessed 20 January 2023).

social assistance and provident fund, education and freedom of communication of the persons), a minimum service shall be guaranteed. Furthermore, workers who strike must give strike communication in advance and must indicate the duration of the strike action. The concept of *'essential public services'* has been progressively extended to different categories of self-employed workers, professionals and artisans, such as lawyers, doctors, truckers, taxi-drivers, gas and oil stations, and so on. In addition to this, some workers are not allowed to strike (e.g. military personnel and policemen). However, striking workers are protected in many respects. For example, workers on strike cannot be dismissed; it is forbidden to hire third parties to replace striking workers; it is not possible to retaliate against workers that undertake legal strike action.

2.2. The Political- context for trade unions

The relations between trade unions and parties can be analysed from several points of view. At least we can mention the “organisational, material or ideological closeness” (Ceron, Negri 2017, 497). In this report, we focus on organisational proximity, which is based on the analysis of the future political career of national trade union leaders after the end of their mandate.

Historically, the birth of the three main trade unions (which in practice was the split of CISL and UIL from the CGIL) was the consequence of the positioning of the various anti-fascist Italian parties in the context of the Cold War. First, in 1948, the Christian Democratic unionists abandoned the CGIL, then dominated by socialists and communists, and founded the CISL. Later, in 1950, the Western left-unionists (i.e. Republicans and Social Democrats) established the UIL (Carotti 2005). Therefore, already in the early 1950s, the political connection between the left-wing CGIL and Communists (PCI)⁹ and Socialists (PSI), between the centrist CISL and the Christian Democracy (DC) and between the reformist UIL and Republicans (PRI) and Social Democrats (PSDI) clearly emerged. These ties lasted almost

⁹ In particular, the relation between CGIL and PCI was so strong that was labelled as ‘transmission belt’ (Bartolini 2000).

entirely until the end of the so-called First Republic in the early 1990s, when most of the political parties that in the 1940s had established the republican Constitution collapsed.

As far as the future political career of trade unions' leaders, table 2 and 3 show us that all former CGIL leaders were elected as parliamentarians of the Communist party or of their descendents, in these cases the PDS. The former leaders of UIL obtained positions within the parliamentary factions of PSDI and PRI: in 1996 the "Democratici – L'Ulivo" list was composed by several components, including also Republicans and Social Democrats. All the former leaders of CISL were elected parliamentarians of the DC, with the only exception of Pierre Carniti, who was elected as parliamentarian of the PSI.

Table 2. Future career of trade union leaders (1945-1994)

| CGIL | | | CISL | | | UIL | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|----------------|-----------|------------|-------------------|-----------|--|
| Name | Term | After | Name | Term | After | Name | Term | After |
| Giuseppe di Vittorio | 1945-1957 | PCI | Giulio Pastore | 1950-1958 | DC | Italo Viglianesi | 1953-1969 | PSDI |
| Agostino Novella | 1957-1970 | PCI | | | | | | |
| | | | Bruno Storti | 1958-1976 | DC | Raffaele Vanni | 1971-1976 | <i>PRI</i> |
| Luciano Lama | 1970-1986 | PCI | Luigi Macario | 1977-1979 | DC | | | |
| Antonio Pizzinato | 1986-1988 | PDS | Pierre Carniti | 1979-1985 | PSI | Giorgio Benvenuto | 1976-1992 | <i>PSI / PPI e Democratici - L'Ulivo</i> |
| Bruno Trentin | 1988-1994 | PDS | Franco Marini | 1985-1991 | DC | | | |

Source: <https://www.cgil.it>, <https://www.cisl.it>, <https://www.uil.it>, <https://www.senato.it>, <https://www.camera.it>

The literature has shown that party-unions relations in Western Europe have changed dramatically since the 1990s (Hyman, Gumbrell-McCormick 2010; Gumbrell-McCormick,

Hyman 2013) and that, in particular, left parties and left-wing trade unions have undergone a progressive detachment, from an ideological and organizational point of view (Piazza 2011, Simoni 2013, Allern, Bale 2017). In Italy, this process has taken place in a slightly different way, because the largest party detachment was experienced by the moderate trade unions rather than the leftist ones. Indeed, in the 1990s, UIL and CISL in the completely lost their original sponsoring, which almost disappeared in the *tangentopoli* scandal.

In fact, even after the collapse of the First Republic, the CGIL has continued to maintain its relations, albeit with less strength (Ceron, Negri 2017), with the post-communist parties, i.e. DS and PDS until 2007 and the Democratic Party (PD) since 2007.

The party connections of CISL and UIL became more problematic, because the original partisan sponsors (DC on one side and PRI-PSDI on the other) have almost vanished. This was particularly true for the UIL, because no party of significant strength emerged in the political space of reformist left: this space was largely occupied by former communists, who, however, have preferred to keep their privileged relations with the CGIL. Conversely, the collapse of the Christian Democrats led to the emergence of several small centrist parties, which positioned themselves in both the centre-right and the centre-left coalitions. The CISL reinforced its ties with these new centre-left Christian parties, which however were less strong than the ancient DC (Ceron, Negri 2017).

Table 3 show us the future career evolution of trade unions leaders since the 1990s. We can notice the usual attaining of former CGIL leaders to the PD parliamentary fraction, while the career of CISL and UIL leaders is obviously less clear. Among the UIL leaders, only one (Piera Larizza) was elected as parliamentarian (in the post-communist Left Democrats – DS), while the other former leaders did not obtain any election. For the former CISL leaders, the situation is more multifaceted, having obtained elections in various political parties, both centre-left (Margherita) and centre-right (UDC). An historical political miracle occurred in the 2022 elections: the PD was able to elect the latest former leaders of both CGIL and CISL: Susanna Camusso and Annamaria Furlan. This clearly represents that the strong, almost symbiotic, CGIL-PCI relation, which had excluded other unions and other

parties, with the particular exception of PSI, is not the same of the CGIL-PD relationship. This change has been analysed from an ideological point of view, having the PD moved towards more neoliberal positions (Ceron, Negri 2017), and also through our organisational lenses. The possibility for the PD to elect at the same spot the former leaders of CGIL and CISL is a clear demonstration of the fact the heirs of the PCI have steadily moved towards more moderate positions, becoming attractive for the CISL personnel but apparently still able to maintain relations, even if no longer mutually exclusive, with the CGIL.

Table 3: Future career of trade union leaders (1994-nowday)

| CGIL | | | CISL | | | UIL | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------|-----------|---|--------------------|-----------|------------|
| Name | Term | After | Name | Term | After | Name | Term | After |
| Sergio Cofferati | 1994-2002 | PD | Sergio D'Antoni | 1991-2000 | <i>Democrazia Europea</i> / Margherita | Pietro Larizza | 1992-2000 | DS |
| Guglielmo Epifani | 2002-2010 | PD | Savino Pezzotta | 2000-2006 | UDC | Luigi Angeletti | 2000-2014 | <i>PSI</i> |
| Susanna Camusso | 2010-2019 | PD | Raffale Bonanni | 2006-2014 | <i>Azione</i> | | | |
| | | | Annamaria Furlan | 2014-2021 | PD | Carmelo Barbagallo | 2014-2020 | <i>PSI</i> |
| Maurizio Landini | 2020- | | Luigi Sbarra | 2021 | | Paolo Bombardieri | 2020- | |

Source: <https://www.cgil.it>, <https://www.cisl.it>, <https://www.uil.it>, <https://www.senato.it>, <https://www.camera.it>

A similar organic relationship also seems to characterise the fourth largest trade union, the UGL (which until 1996 was called CISNAL). In this case, the closest political family is the post-fascist and nationalist one. Indeed, of the 10 former leaders of CISNAL-UGL, six were elected as parliamentarians by the MSI, AN or the PDL. The latest party embodiment of the nationalist family in Italy, Brothers of Italy / FdI, is too recent and its potential relations with UGL still are to be analysed.

On the other side of the political spectrum, many smaller unions, such as Cobas, USB, RDB, CUB, SlaiCobas, carry evident far-left, anti-capitalist, anarchist and communist orientations (Sacchetti 2012). Their relations with left-wing parties, such as *Rifondazione Comunista*¹⁰, *Potere al Popolo*, *Sinistra Italiana*, the new PCI, are yet to be analysed. As yet the role of the party that was the largest in the Italian elections between and 2013 and 2019, i.e. the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (M5S), needs be investigated. Its populist and anti-intermediation origins, for a long time, prevented it from establishing any organic relations with other mass organizations, there included the workers' unions. However, the spirit of antagonism and anti-establishment of the M5S attracted many trade union members among its many voters and sympathisers also. Finally, the recent turn to the left of the M5S after the fall of the Conte II executive and the fact that is sometimes emerges in the opinion polls as the strongest political party on the left, also scoring stronger than PD, could open spaces for the M5S to establish new relations with the world of workers and trade unions.

To conclude our analysis on the relation between trade unions and parties, we have to mention some trade unions which fiercely wave their political independence from political ideologies and parties. Among these, we can mention, at least, Gilda, Snals, Cisl. Their effective independence will be measured in our research.

2.3 Challenges, threats and opportunities faced by trade unions in expanding their power and the scope and coverage of collective agreements.

¹⁰ Bertolino (2004) analysed the presence of *Rifondazione Comunista* exponents in the CGIL, in which they often monopolised some leftist minority tendencies, which were not part of the dominant internal coalition controlled by the DS-PD supporters.

According to what we have already underlined in the previous sections, the main Italian trade unions challenges are the decline of the collective bargaining power undermined by the growing globalization of the economy which give multinational companies to move operations to countries with lower labor costs; the government new unilateralist approach with economic and labour policies; and the resistance of companies to sign collective agreements. Moreover, the main trade unions also suffer the competition “from below” of other smaller, autonomous and more combative unions. These unions also challenge the confederal organizations in the representation of the new forms of work among atypical workers in sectors such as logistics, platforms and similar.

Opportunities derive from the urgent need by the side of the workers to a solid and effective trade union representation, which can be drawn upon by revitalising the unions organization and democracy, starting from the company and territorial level. Moreover, by relying on their tradition and identity, Italian trade unions have the potential to rejuvenate their participation in both labor-related issues and new social movements, such as migrant rights and climate change (as discussed in section 3.1). It is important to note that social and political mobilization can lead to an increase in membership and bargaining power for the trade unions, as demonstrated in other sections (1.1, 1.2)

3. Trade unions strategies

3.1. Organizational strategies in attracting members

Back in history, political alignment played a crucial role in the strategy to attract trade union members. Workers who identified with traditional mass parties were encouraged to become trade union members. Mobilization was also a key component of the strategy, with a focus on strike activities, but not limited to them. In addition, workers representation at the company level, even when the work councils were informal, proved to be instrumental in attracting membership. Furthermore, significant advancements in workers' rights and conditions contributed to an increase in membership over time, at least until the early 1970s (Figure 1).

It is worth noticing that a past econometric study (Checchi and Corneo, 2000) revealed that, controlling for other factors, including the economic cycles and concessions, trade unions' membership growth was found to be associated only with the intensity of industrial conflict, as measured by the number of days lost due to strikes.

As Regalia (2012, p. 393) wrote, the increase of the “membership during the 1970s, until the point of greatest growth in 1978, was closely connected with the period of extraordinary collective mobilization in the late 1960s and early 1970s, during which the trade-union confederations regained strong unity of action, their relationships with workers were radically redefined, and, for both members and non-members, novel spaces were opened up for participation and control from below through the spread of assemblies and the creation of new workplace representation structures (factory councils) ... In this context, membership of the trade-union confederations ensued 'spontaneously' from the solidarity and the new collective identities brought into being by the mobilization, while traditional oppositions along party-ideological lines greatly attenuated”.

As previously noted, due to the recent decline in membership, particularly among active and non-traditional workers, trade unions are making efforts to represent them. This is being done either through the formation of new dedicated federations by confederal unions or through grassroots mobilization at the company and industry level by smaller, rank-and-file trade unions. Finally, the delivery of services has been found to be an effective way to attract new members, particularly among pensioners (Leonardi and Pedersini, forthcoming).

3.2 Strategies in collective bargaining processes: negotiations with social partners' organizations and state institutions, coalition building with other organizations;

The power of trade unions in collective bargaining has historically been tied to four main drivers: a) representation power among workers, b) industrial power relations and bargaining capacity, c) party linkages and government accessibility, and d) trade union unity. According to Culpepper and Regan (2014), Italian trade unions, like other unions in

Europe, have relied on a combination of incentives and threats in both the industrial and political realms to gain leverage in collective bargaining (Table 3).

Table 3. Unions strategies for collective bargaining

| | Firm-level | Polity-level |
|--------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Carrot | Mobilize consent | Problem-solving |
| Stick | Industrial action | Mass protests |

Source: Culpeper and Regan 2014, p. 729.

Today, the power of trade unions in collective bargaining is being threatened by various factors, as we discussed in previous sections (1.1, 2.3). As we have observed, trade union unity is more likely to be achieved when governments do not take a unilateral approach and allow for more inclusive decision-making. In such cases, mass protests may be the only way for marginalized trade unions to have their voices heard and their role as workers' representatives recognized. At the firm level, the need for mobilization of consent is decreasing, as employers have more power to opt out and reduce the power of unions at the company level. Additionally, the ability of firms to opt out also weakens the role of employer organizations, thereby undermining the entire collective bargaining system. Under such conditions, trade unions are divided on what strategies should be taken, with some of them preferring the carrot and other, especially on the left, preferring the stick.

4. Trade unions, civil society and social movements

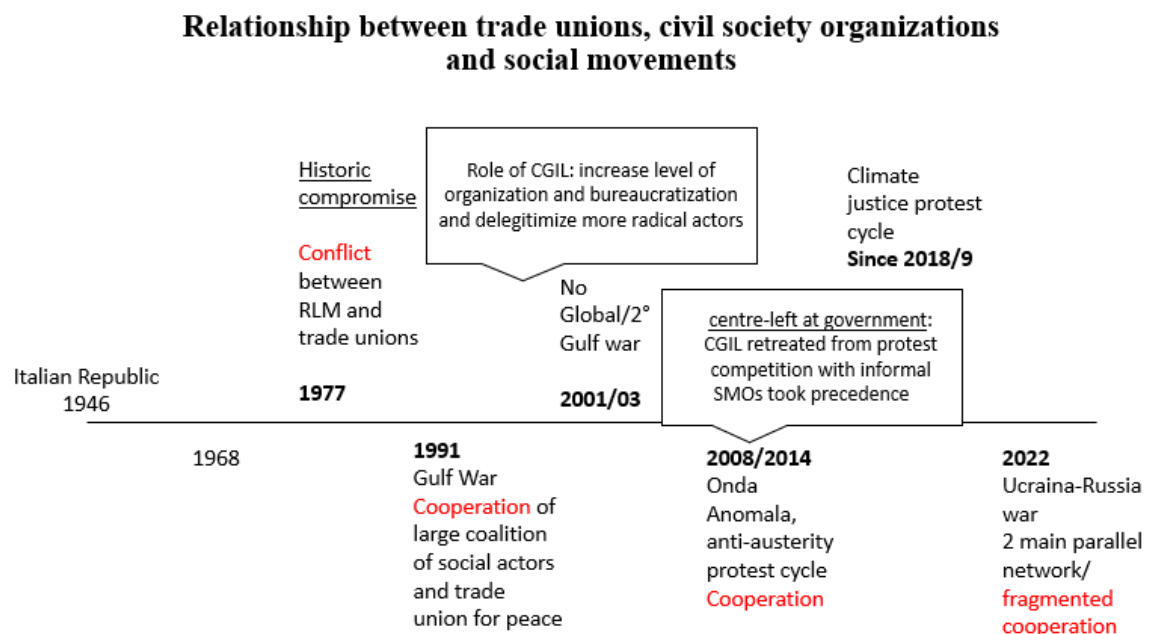
4.1 Relationship between trade unions, civil society organizations and social movements: ties and contradictions over the years

The relationship between trade unions and civil society has gone through various phases, marked by significant moments of cooperation and significant breaking events (Figure 2). To better understand the pattern of interaction between trade unions, civil society organizations, and social movements, we can focus on specific cycles of protest and protest campaigns. By "protest cycle," we mean a phase of increased conflict in the social system, with a rapid intensification and spread of collective action from more to less mobilized

sectors (Tarrow 2011, p. 199). By "protest campaign," we refer to a series of actions supported by a large, temporary, single-issue coalition of actors with a specific goal (della Porta and Andretta 2002).

Since the birth of the Italian Republic in 1946, the relationship between trade unions and civil society has been generally positive, with a productive phase of intense cooperation during the struggles of 1968. During the period of 1968 to 1970, workers, trade unions, and a large student movement established a pattern of cooperation based on class identification, advocating for workers' rights and increased access to university for low-income individuals. This was the height of cooperation between trade unions, particularly CGIL and FIOM, and SMOs, which led to significant achievements, including the Workers Statute (Settis 2020), which remains a crucial tool for workers' defense and organization today. However, in the following decade, this pattern of cooperation changed due to the impact of the PCI's strategy of the *historic compromise*.

Figure 2



This strategy also affected the interaction between CGIL, strongly connected with PCI, and social movement organizations (SMOs), especially those from the radical left. Tensions boiled over into open conflict in 1977, when a growing student movement challenged Luciano Lama, leader of CGIL, leading to a confrontation with the order service organized by PCI (OR 17/2/22). This event marked a turning point and caused a significant rift between traditional left organizations like CGIL and PCI and the radical left organizations, which lasted for several years.

During the 1990s, significant transformations took place, marking a break with the past. Since then, a series of protest movements and single-issue campaigns have triggered social conflicts in which trade unions, civil society groups, and SMOs have begun to cooperate again. The 1991 Gulf War was the first instance of cooperation among a wide coalition of actors, including trade unions, catholic associations, disarmament networks, students, and other groups. Demonstrations, peace marches, and train blockades carrying weapons and ammunition were organized (CP 8/12/22). CGIL, CISL, and UIL organized a successful general strike on January 15, 1991, which was accompanied by demonstrations against Italian and Western intervention in the war (CISL 16/1/16).

However, it was the globalization and its socio-economic and ecological consequences that presented the greatest challenges to unions and social movements. The globalization and concerns about its effects gave rise to the No Global movement, also known as the alter-globalization movement or the movement of movements, highlighting the breadth and diversity of this cycle of protest. The alter-globalization movement provided opportunities for both local and international trade unions to collaborate with other SMOs and to shape contentious politics in the era of globalization. In Italy, a large and radical cycle of protest emerged, involving a diverse coalition of actors from the most radical and antagonist to the Catholic, using a variety of action repertoires. The Italian alter-globalization movement gave rise to the Genoa Social Forum, inspired by the Porto Alegre experience, and became more visible during the 2001 demonstrations in Genoa against the G20, which were met with strong repression. CGIL, the main Italian trade union that can mobilize millions of people, took part in these demonstrations, along with new grassroots trade unions such as

COBAS, USI, CUB, etc. However, CGIL and its FIOM steelworker's category played a key role in the years that followed, particularly in the worldwide anti-war movement, which was organized with the pivotal role of the Florence Social Forum, born in 2002. This movement spread throughout the world, especially in Italy, and was highlighted by the 2003 anti-war demonstration in Iraq that drew three million people (Imperatore and Andretta 2021; Zamponi 2021).

The focus of this cycle of protests reveals the engagement of trade unions on the deeply transformed issue of labor and war, while also showing interaction between different organizations and topics. The strategic role of CGIL in the anti-war movement has transformed the protest field by increasing its level of organization and bureaucratization and delegitimizing more radical actors and actions (Imperatore and Andretta 2021). The involvement of major trade unions in mobilization has a double effect: on one hand it increases the coalition and participation, but on the other hand it moderates the movement by marginalizing radical elements due to CGIL's relationship with the political system. The divide between CGIL and the radical left movement, which was not aligned with PCI (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou 2017), tends to persist because of CGIL's relationship with center-left parties, as we will see in future protest cycles.

In fact, while other significant mobilization events took place during this phase in the realm of collective bargaining (as outlined in section 4.2), a new cycle of protests began in 2008 with the student movement known as the "Onda Anomala," and it continues with the anti-austerity movement. Since 2008, the issues raised by the anti-globalization movement have become a reality, and the world of labor, as well as several other sectors such as education, healthcare, and welfare, has been severely affected by the economic crisis, exacerbated by austerity policies (Andretta 2022).

In the autumn of 2008, the season of university occupations began in response to Law 133 - which cut funding for research and university education – by representing the first anti-austerity measure in Italy. The students led the social opposition against these austerity policies and the center-right government led by Silvio Berlusconi (Zamponi 2021). by adopting the slogan "we don't pay for the crisis" connecting the defense of public and

quality universities, threatened by funding cuts, with the issue of the economic crisis and austerity (Bosi and Zamponi 2019). The student movement interacted with trade unions, particularly during the "No Gelmini" day ((Mariastella Gelmini was the Minister of Education, University and Research)), organized by students and both grassroots and confederate trade unions, that call to strike the workers of school (30/10/08) and universities (14/11/08) and, sometimes, call for a general strike (17/10/08 for grassroots unions and 12/12/08 for CGIL).

In 2010, a new university reform proposed by Mariastella Gelmini (under the government of Berlusconi) sparked a wave of protests. The conflict quickly spread, with mass demonstrations and the occupation of famous monuments, railway stations, airports, and highways (Bosi and Zamponi, 2019). The student movement and trade unions joined forces in various events and assemblies held at universities, and in October, students participated in the FIOM demonstration (October 16, 2010). Different groups and organizations converged under the political platform "Uniti contro la crisi" (United Against the Crisis), based on their common opposition to the austerity measures supported by the Berlusconi government.

The focus on changes in the labor and education/research fields highlights the rise of a "precariousness generation" (Ibidem) affected first by limited access to education and then by difficulty finding jobs with guaranteed basic rights.

The trade unions' relevance in the current cycle of protests can be understood by considering that from 2009 to 2014, trade unions participated in 44% of protest events (Andretta 2022, p.72). The confederal unions participated in 62% of the events while grassroots unions in 40% (Ibidem). There was a significant change in the relationship between trade unions and protest and between trade unions and other SMOs with the change of government. During the centre-right government led by Berlusconi, the level of conflict between trade unions was high (52% of protest events with trade union participation), but it reduced rapidly with the new technical government led by Mario Monti (2011-2013) and the centre-left government led by Enrico Letta (2013-2014). With

the centre-left government, the CGIL retreated from protest and the competition with informal SMOs took precedence.

During the anti-austerity protests in Italy, trade unions and SMOs (social movement organizations) collaborated also in specific campaigns. In 2011, a referendum was held on three key issues (public water, nuclear energy, and the judicial system). The CGIL played a prominent role in collecting signatures for the referendum by working with other grassroots unions and SMOs in the "Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua" (CGIL 14/6/11). The UIL and CISL provided weaker support for the referendum. Among the confederate unions, CGIL was the most supportive, opposing also the questions on nuclear energy and legitimate impediments (CGIL 6/6/11).

The campaign for the referendum demonstrated a wide awareness among traditional and grassroots trade unions regarding social and ecological issues. However, the cycle of LULU (Locally Unwanted Land Uses) protests that have taken place across the country since the 90s highlights a strong conflict between trade unions, particularly the confederal ones, and local committees and SMOs concerning the use of territories and natural resources. (Imperatore 2021).

The global cycle of protests around ecology and climate change that began in 2018 has seen a new generation of activists take to the streets, calling for immediate action to address global warming. In Italy, both new actors like Fridays for Future (FFF) and Extinction Rebellion, as well as established actors like the LULU, crossed on ecology field (Bertuzzi *et al.* 2021). This wave of protests is putting the issue of ecological degradation and climate change at the forefront of public debate and political agendas, and even involving trade unions.

Most political and trade union actors have verbally supported the climate protests, but the relationship between trade unions and environmental movements remains complex. Some grassroots unions have supported all of the climate strikes organized by Fridays For Future, while others, like CGIL, have only called for a strike once during the 4th climate strike in September 2019. Despite this, all trade unions have attempted to engage with Fridays For

Future and the issue of climate change (CISL 15/9/21). In some cases, this interaction has resulted in a positive outcome based on shared ideas of ecological transitions (such as in the case of Civitavecchia) (BN 29/3/22), while in others, the interaction remains conflictual.

Basically, the pattern of interaction between trade unions and ecologist SMOs has different levels of intensity and strongly depends by the local context and by the topic. In any case, since the July 2021 the mobilization of GKN workers (see 4.2) marked a crucial turning point: the workers organized in Collettivo di Fabbrica gave birth to a convergence between different social sector of society, by focusing in particular on the alliance between climate justice movement and workers one. They opened a cycle of contentious with joint mobilizations between the ecologist galaxy and the workers organizations took place, by calling for a social and climate justice (Andretta *et al.* 2023).

The outbreak of war in Ukraine has significantly impacted the daily lives of millions of Italian citizens. This has led to a fragmented mobilization of civil society, with both confederal and grassroots unions taking to the streets and organizing with SMOs (social movement organizations) to protest the war and Italy's role in the conflict, calling for peace negotiations. On November 5th, 2022, a wide coalition of actors including trade unions, social centers, catholic groups, workers, students, and many others (CLAP 5/11/22) came together for the "Europe for Peace" national demonstration in Rome (CGIL 18/10/22). On the same day, another demonstration took place in Naples against the war, the high cost of living, and precarious work. The demonstration was attended by workers, social centers, environmentalist movements, and the most radical grassroots trade unions such as Si.Cobas (Ansa 31/10/22). On December 2nd, 2022, all the grassroots trade unions organized a strike, followed by a national demonstration against the war and militarization. During these events, interaction took place between trade unions and social movement organizations, but in a civil society context strongly fragmented on both trade union and social movements side.

4.2 Trade unions mobilization and labour conflict

The last three decades have seen significant changes in trade unionism and labor dynamics, leading to significant conflicts in a context of increasing precariousness (Figure 3). Precarity, with its consequences in terms of flexibilization of labour 'duration, rights, and wages, has been the most salient issue in the labour struggles of the last years (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou 2017, p.89). To give a panoramic view about the most important mobilization in the field of bargaining, we focus on the main struggles that have involved a specific law or reform (as for the Article 18 and the Job's Act) and on the most relevant struggles or campaigns conducted against precariousness and for basic labour right in specific sectors (as riders, logistic, the 8x5 campaign, etc.). This overview also helps to understand the transformations in trade unions, workers' claims, and their organization and action repertoires in recent decades.

The agreements of the early 1990s marked significant turning points in Italian industrial relations. In July 1992, a social pact was signed by the confederal trade unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL), the national government, and Confindustria (the industrialist group) that ended the mechanism of salary scaling aimed at protecting workers' purchasing power from inflation. The highlight of this process was the Protocol of July 23, 1993, which established a new pattern of industrial relations based on concertation and set new criteria for collective bargaining, paving the way for decentralized bargaining.

Most important mobilizations of industrial actions in the latest three decades on bargaining process

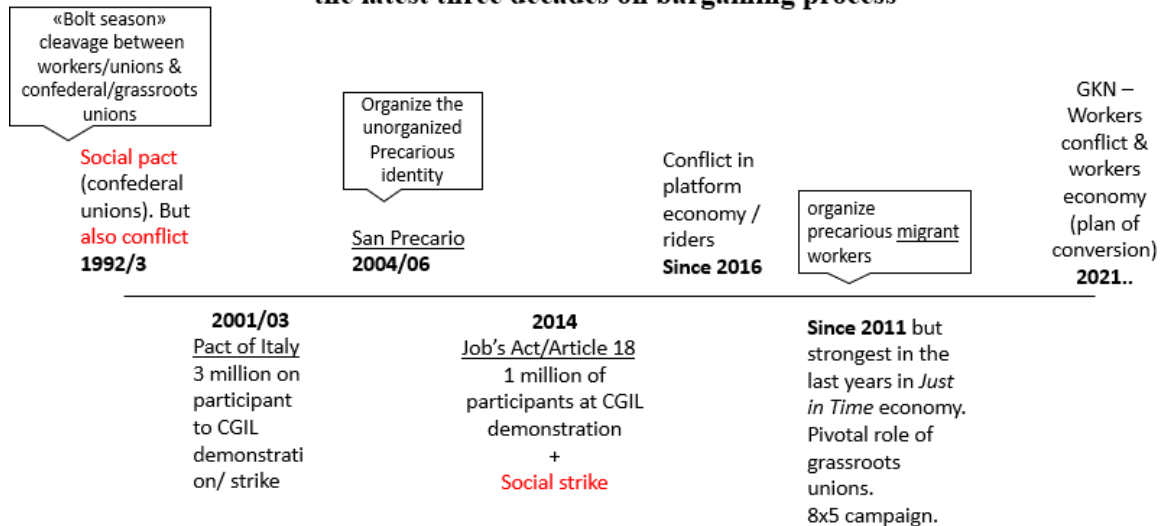


Figure 3

In these years, the Italian industrial regime and the relationship between confederal unions and workers underwent a major transformation. On one hand, the Amato government's budget law of September 1992 had a negative impact on families and workers, leading to protests and public talks organized by CGIL, CISL, and UIL. On the other hand, these same confederal unions were targeted by the protests. In fact, they faced criticism and lost legitimacy among workers by signing the salary scale agreement of July 1992, which was seen as a historic surrender (Bernocchi 1993). During several events and talks, as in Florence, Naples, Turin and Milan, these unions were contested with the throw of eggs, stones and bolts. This conducted the confederal unions to protect themselves during the events by the same workers by using plexiglass and security services during the phase passed into history as the “bolts season” (OR 22/9/22).

The start of the 2000s saw major companies attempt to overcome the two-tier contractual system in order to improve the decentralized industrial relations system. This resulted in bilateral negotiations and the emergence of separate agreements. The first outcome of this new phase was the Pact for Italy of 5 July 2002, signed by CISL and UIL but contested by

CGIL that refused to negotiate a document that included a proposal to amend Article 18 of the Workers' Statute, that disciplines the issue of dismissal.

Around this topic, we assist between 2001 and 2002 to a strong struggle of CGIL against the government. In fact, in December 2001 several strikes are organized with success by CGIL: the participation to the strike is very high (around 90% of workers), and at the same time different demonstrations take place (Rep 7/12/01). On CGIL initiative, the 23 March 2002 around 3 million people gather in Rome in defence of the Article 18 and the Workers Statute (Rep 25/10/14). It was the largest Italian manifestation of the history, through which the attack on Article 18 was avoided.

During the first decade of the new millennium, parallel to the mobilization to defend the Workers Statute and workers' rights in general, new actors and forms of mobilization emerged in response to the issue of labor precariousness. The new challenge was to organize workers who were unorganized and lacked traditional rights, such as those with short-term contracts and often without trade union representation. The precariousness not only negatively impacts workers' rights but also affects labor activism. The atomization and individualization of tasks, combined with the rapid replacement of workers and the pressure placed on precarious workers to renew their contracts, create a challenging environment for “developing membership of organisations that could grant them the power of collective bargaining” (Pichault and Semenza 2019, p.9). Despite these material obstacles, precarious workers have explored and established new forms of organization and representation.

The first example of organizing precarious workers was – in 2004 - through the creation of the symbolic figure of San Precario, the saint that protects workers in precarious and intermittent jobs. Between 2004 and 2006, San Precario appeared in several Italian cities through procession and parade in which he “was depicted wearing the uniform of supermarket workers, but also many arms, to symbolise the multiplicity of jobs that can be done at the same time” (Bruni and Murgia 2007, p.70) by intermittent workers. In 2006 this network organized in Milan the MayDay Parade, the “first 1° may of rebel precariousness” at which 100.000 persons took part, in parallel with the mobilization of other twenty

European cities (Ibidem). San Precario was an attempt aimed at bringing attention to the rise of a new class of workers - the "precari" - and highlighting the challenges they faced in terms of employment and overall quality of life.

This made visible the outline of a new social subject that started to self-organize to face the precarity and that would become central in the future labour mobilisations, as we will see later.

As already discussed, since 2008 an anti-austerity cycle of protest took place. While during the Monti and Letta governments some organizations as CGIL demobilized (see 4.1), by contracting the field of protest, in 2014 the conflict between government, trade unions and SMOs exacerbated again. With Matteo Renzi, new prime minister since February 2014 and leader of Democratic Party, the Workers Statute again became threatened and the already heavy precarious conditions worsened due to spread of short-term employment formulas (as the voucher, whose use was expanded by the Job's Act). The Renzi government decided for a reform of labour through the Job's Act, oriented to make more flexible the labour market. With the Job's Act, the government wanted also to abrogate the Article 18 of Workers Statute, fundamental in both material and symbolic terms. This decision opened a strong conflict between workers and trade unions on one hand, and government on the other. With the Renzi leadership of DP, CGIL lost its influence on political institutions and started a struggle against Job's Act and in defence of Article 18. On October 25th 2014, the CGIL organized a demonstration in Rome with over 1 million participants to protest against the Job's Act and government labor policies. Two months later, on December 12th, 2014, the CGIL and UIL organized a nationwide strike with local demonstrations. During the two-year tenure of the Renzi government, the CGIL organized more than 20 national protest events.

At the same time, also the precarious organized. Their most notable initiative was the social strike that took place on November 14th, 2014. A coalition of autonomous social centers, grassroots unions, student organizations, and precarious workers participated in the strike to bring attention to the fact that most precarious workers were not allowed to strike and to demonstrate their opposition to labor policy. The social strike was a

significant event that made the voices of precarious workers heard and visible (Andretta 2022). They are invisible workers and for this reasons they used the social strike “to overcome traditional barriers to workers’ mobilization” (Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou 2017, p.92) and become visible on the streets and the squares. Since they couldn’t stop their work and block their plants or factories, they decided to block the streets. The social strike was organized in ten Italian cities, with blockades and occupations, focusing not only on labour issues but on a wide set of topics as welfare, housing, and environment, all impacting on precariousness conditions (Ibidem, Andretta 2022). As stressed by Zamponi and Vogiatzoglou (2017, p.92), the “social strike proved to be an efficient tool to build a movement coalition in opposition to neoliberal policies and to bring back traditional concepts of trade union activity” but, at the same time, “it did not appear to have a significant impact on Italian society at large”.

Both confederate trade unions and the most radical groups, such as grassroots unions and social movement organizations, lost the struggle against a government that was determined to reform the labor law, overcoming opposition from a significant portion of civil society and trade unions. In March 2015, the Job's Act, a legislative decree passed in 2014, became law. Nevertheless, the debate that was sparked and the tactics and strategies that were tested during this struggle became important for the subsequent mobilization of the most precarious and exploited workers, including those in the digital platform industry.

In October 2016 a first protest of riders took place in Turin (Chesta et al. 2019). This was just the first expression of a phenomenon of contestation that crossed the country. In Milan, Bologna, Palermo, Pisa and other cities, groups of riders of JustEat, Foodora, Deliveroo and other digital platform started to organize (Riders Union Bologna, Deliverance Milano, Deliveroo Strike Riders and other self-organized groups arose) and mobilize matching the traditional demonstration with the critical mass based on the use of bike, to claim “better working conditions and attract public attention to the peculiar nature of their status in the labour market” (Ibidem, p.826). Self-organized unions have joined forces to fight for the implementation of the national bargaining agreement in transportation,

introduction of a legitimate employment contract, renewal of all contracts, hourly pay system, minimum wage, guarantee of a minimum of 20 working hours per week, and improvement of workers' safety conditions (Ibidem).

The coordinated campaign for the contractualization of delivery riders has achieved partial success. Negotiations have been opened at both the local and national levels, with the participation of traditional trade unions, who recognize the role of self-organized workers' collectives. In the past two years, the riders' organizations have emerged victorious in several legal disputes, establishing that the riders should be considered employees of the platform. This represented a crucial request of the riders, and in 2021 JustEat started with the first hirings (ISole24ore 4/2/21) but the struggle is yet open. The rider's grassroots organization call for a public intervention to guarantee to all the riders the collective agreement and the recognition of the subordinate nature of work (IIPost 9/11/20). This represents one of the most important examples of precarious mobilization able to organize the unorganized and to obtain important outcomes in terms of collective agreement and workers' rights.

Important mobilizations were held also in the logistic sector, even more transformed by the *Just in Time* logic. Since 2011 and with even more radicality in the following years, workers of warehouses and of the delivery services of logistic supply chain as TNT, GLS, Fedex, Bartolini, Amazon, Ikea, LIDL, and other several big firms engaged in a long season of struggles based on strikes, pickets and demonstrations (Cini and Goldmann 2020).

The logistics sector is characterized by high levels of precariousness due to the flexible system of cooperatives that often change or close, leading to the firing of all workers. The workers in this sector face close control, intensive work rhythms, and anti-union policies. However, the struggles conducted by workers, mainly organized in grassroots unions such as Si.Cobas and Adl Cobas, have produced important results in terms of workers' conditions and collective agreements. This has sometimes led to firms directly hiring workers (NM 17/10/16) with all the necessary guarantees.



One of the key accomplishments of the ongoing season of struggle is the ability to organize precarious and migrant workers from various countries that often doesn't speak the same language. As Cini and Goldmann (2020, p.27) argue, these grassroots unions have been fundamental in "actively encourage the building of political ties between the various ethnic communities, thus helping to overcome divisions fuelled by management and adopt a common language of social struggle".

A similar attempt has been conducted by Si.Cobas in the textile district of Prato (Tuscany) in which migrant and blackmailed workers have been exploited 12 hours by day for all the week without any labour contract and any rights (SiCobas 19/2/21). In this context, the grassroots union with the workers engaged in a campaign named "8X5", that stands for the right to have a collective agreement that limit the working week to 5 days and for a maximum of 8 hours per day. This campaign has took place and currently take place in a very conflictual context, in which both the firms and the public institution are often enemies. At the same time, after several strikes in all the district, pickets of several days, the demonstrations, the legal actions and the solidarity of the most radical left groups, in the last years hundreds of workers have obtained a regular contract by the basic rights by winning this important struggle.

To conclude, the previously mentioned struggle at GKN represents a highly commendable example of interaction between workers, trade unions, and SMOs and is considered one of the most significant industrial actions in Italy in recent years. When on 9th July of 2021 the trade union representative unit (RSU) received e-mail informing that all workers (422) of the plant have been fired and that the plant will be closed since the day after, the workers auto-organized in "Collettivo di Fabbrica" seized the plant by announcing a permanent assembly. The Collective started a strong action that was developed on three main levels: mobilization, legal action, and planning for industrial reconversion. The workers carried out large demonstrations at both the local and national levels, with support from a wide coalition of SMOs and trade unions, particularly the grassroots ones, nevertheless the historic close relationship of GKN workers with CGIL. The demonstration is aimed at

emphasizing the importance of the reconversion plan developed by workers and scholars, which is currently the only viable solution for saving the plant (Andretta et al. 2023).

5. Conclusions

The profile of the Italian trade union landscape has undergone significant changes. The membership of active workers has declined, and the bargaining power of the main trade unions has weakened due to bargaining decentralization and increased power of opting out by employers. Furthermore, the trade union arena has become more fragmented, with new, often small and combative trade unions challenging the traditional confederations, especially in non-traditional sectors of the market and among atypical workers. These new unions often compensate for the decline in the use of confrontational strategies by the main confederations. The economic crisis has further worsened the negotiation power of trade unions due to the imposition of austerity policies on national governments by the European Union institutions. However, during the pandemic, the trade unions' capacity to negotiate with both institutions and employers seems to have been revitalized.

Despite these changes, and in comparison to other European countries, trade unions in Italy remain very representative organizations, perhaps the last mass organizations in the Italian political landscape. They have a strong presence in the factories, albeit unevenly distributed, and maintain good connections with institutions at both the national and local levels. Additionally, they still possess significant bargaining power, despite the effects of bargaining decentralization and the increased power of employers to opt out.

There are different reasons which explain the relative resilience of trade unionism in Italy.

The Italian Constitution is a significant source of workers' and unions' rights, with Article 1 stating that "Italy is a democratic republic founded on work". This article draws inspiration from the three main cultural traditions of the Resistance in WWII: the Liberal, Christian-Democratic, and Marxist cultures.

Another important legal framework for trade unions is the "Statute of Workers" (1970), which was initially highly protective of workers' rights. However, in recent years, the labor market has undergone significant changes towards precarization and liberalization. Both

center-left and center-right governments have pursued neoliberal policies, approving changes such as law 56/1987, "Treu package" in 1997, "Biagi law" in 2003, "Fornero Reform" in 2012, and the Jobs Act in 2014-2016.

Currently, Collective Agreements can be at three levels: National, regional, and company level. The right to strike is granted at the constitutional level but with some limitations for workers in 'essential public services'. Despite these changes, trade unions in Italy remain significant organizations with strong representation and bargaining power.

After the collapse of the party system in the so-called first Republic in 1993, political connections are less evident, but the center-left Partito Democratico (PD) maintains connections with all three major unions (CGIL, CISL, and UIL). The conservative Fratelli d'Italia has links with UGL. Left-wing parties (such as Rifondazione Comunista, Sinistra Italiana, Art1, and Potere al Popolo) are present as minorities in CGIL and some small left-wing unions, such as Cobas, USB, RDB, CUB, and SlaiCobas. The role of Movimento 5 Stelle and the connections of significant independent unions, such as Gilda, Snals, and Cisl, still need to be assessed.

Additionally, trade unions in Italy have been able to maintain their connection with Italian citizens and workers by revitalizing their strategies, which involve combining their representation capacity at the plant level with assistance in legal disputes and offering various services to both union members and non-members.

Finally, despite a decline in their use of strikes, Italian trade unions remain relevant and representative organizations. They have maintained their connections with civil society organizations, and their role in protest mobilization persists.

Despite some limitation, cooperation is the primary mode of interaction between both confederate and grassroots unions and civil society organizations, with some exceptions throughout history, such as in the late 1970s when we observed a widening gap between CGIL, which was more moderate and inclined towards compromise with other political components of society, and the student social movement, which was more radical in terms of their actions and demands.



In the protest arena, the move toward concertation strategies in the 90ies notwithstanding, both confederal and grassroots unions have in the last decades mobilized against reform that threatens the rights conquered with the struggles for the Worker Statute occurred, as those in defence of Article 18 and against Job's Act in 2002 and 2014. On the other hand, new collective workers identities, actors and organizations emerged with the goal to organize the most unorganized and precarious workers. In the field of high skilled precarious workers, some informal network emerged since 2004, by matching the traditional demonstration with innovative and very symbolic actions (as the social strike).

In the protest arena, despite the move towards concertation strategies in the 90s, both confederal and grassroots unions have mobilized in the last few decades against reforms that threaten the rights achieved through the struggles for the Worker Statute. Examples of such mobilizations include those in defense of Article 18 and against the Jobs Act in 2002 and 2014. On the other hand, new collective worker identities, actors, and organizations have emerged with the goal of organizing the most unorganized and precarious workers. In the field of high-skilled precarious workers, informal networks have emerged since 2004, combining traditional demonstrations with innovative and highly symbolic actions, such as the social strike. In recent years, new forms of mobilization have emerged in the digital platform market, such as among riders, logistics workers, and other low-skilled migrant precarious workers. These workers operate on a Just-In-Time basis. Grassroots unions, such as Si Cobas and ADL, have used long pickets and strikes to build political ties between various ethnic communities and have achieved important outcomes in terms of collective bargaining and workers' rights.

The struggle of GKN workers opened a new phase in which mobilization and convergence with several social segments of society - first of all, the ecological one - involved legal action and planning for ecological industrial reconversion. This challenged the way in which we traditionally think about working-class activism, and this is an ongoing process that we are still observing (Andretta, Gabriellini and Imperatore, forthcoming).

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