

ImproCollBar - European Round Table
*Improving the scope and coverage of collective bargaining in
Europe*

**The coalition building:
the Italian case within
a theoretical and comparative scenario**

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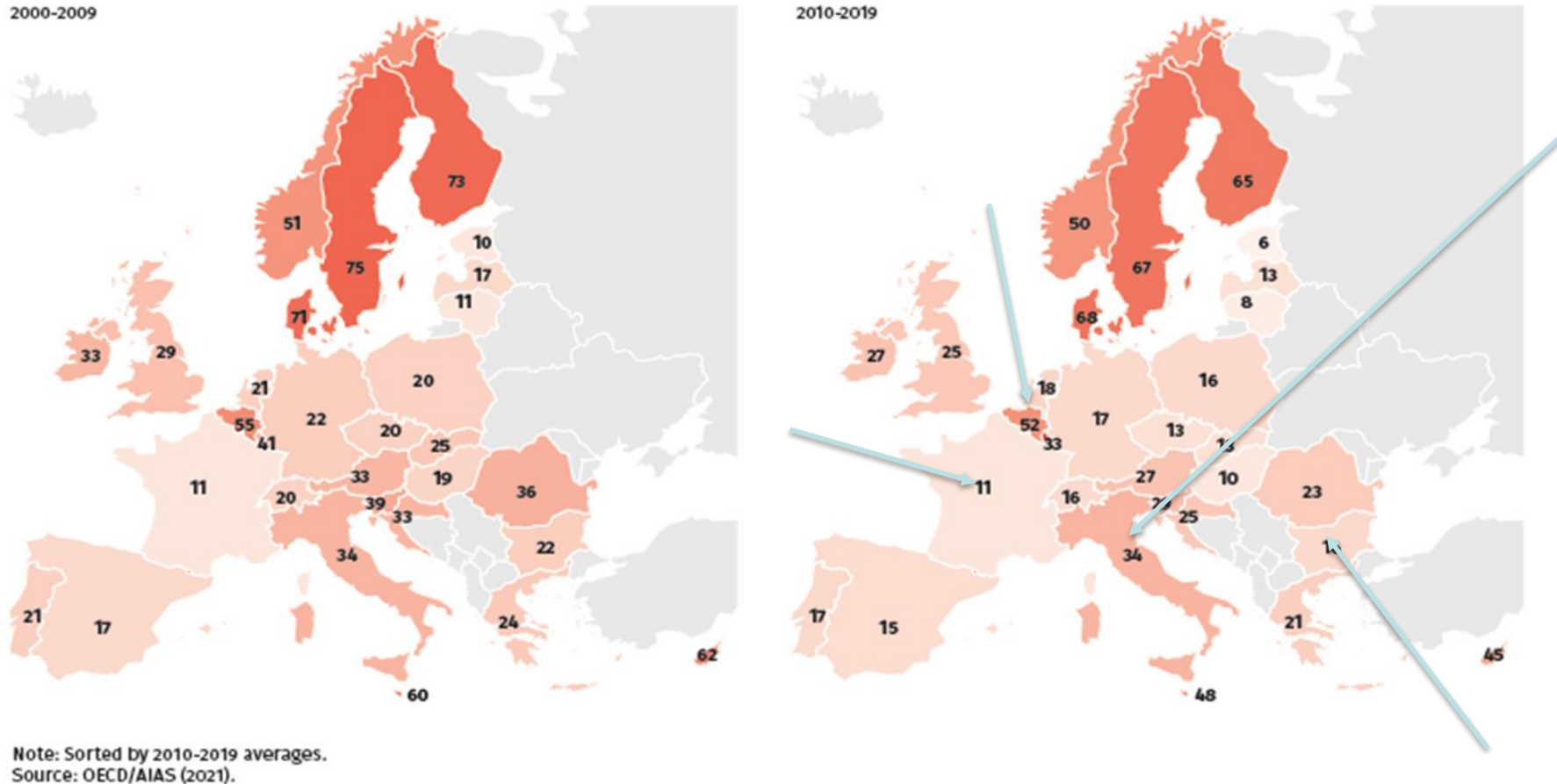
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Factors promoting TUs/Community coalitions

- TU Renewal/Revitalization, through expanding interest representation and constituency
- From workplace and 'rational' self-interest to a community broader concern
- A new ethos for a socially and morally embedded economy
- Reframe narrative and innovate the strategic repertoire in a post-labour centred society
- Reinforcing the societal legitimacy in times of reduced consensus and popularity
- "Intersectionality" and collective action in fighting all kind discriminations (gender, race, class)
- Searching and recruiting new members and leaders

The decline of trade union density in Europe

Figure 3.14b Trade union density per country, 2000-2009 and 2010-2019 (%)



Why trade unions are in «rough waters»?

1) macro-economic: globalization

Production relocations
High labour mobility
“Shop regime” competition
Cheap labour and wage dumping

2) socio-organizational: post-Fordism

Technological change
HRM and direct participation

3) legal-contractual: work precariousness

Changing composition of the labour market
Underemployment and casual work
Freelance work and bogus self-employment
Gig economy and platform work (Uberization)

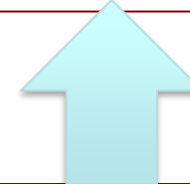
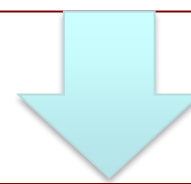
4) cultural-ideological: neo-individualism;

Crisis of class-based images of society
Sunset of the “big narratives” and ideologies of the labour movement
Instrumental goals and attitudes to work
Crisis of the political left and class voting de-alignment vs. right-wing populism



Decline of Keynesian economic policies
Pressure on wages and growing inequalities
Labour market flexibility and de-regulation
Downsizing of the welfare state
Work polarization

Disintermediation and Post-democracy



Decline of

- trade union membership and density
- Collective bargaining coverage,
- Industrial mobilization and conflicts

**Increasing imbalance in
labour/capital power relationships**



What do we talk when we talk about «coalition building»?

- The terminological confusion: “social movement unionism, union-community coalitions, social unionism, community unionism, social justice unionism or citizenship movement unionism» (Ross, 2007)
- «A secondary union method to extend the traditional union activity beyond the sphere of job regulation, narrowly conceived in order to pursuit shared or common goals between T.U. and non-labour institutions in social society, including community, advocacy, campaigning organizations» (Frege, 2005)
- «A mechanism for advancing union power by developing powerful alliances in order to rebuild union’s political and economic influence» (Tattersall, 2007)
- «With the expected advantage of gaining membership, societal power and legitimacy and prestige in public opinion» (Schmidt, 2005)

Why the unions build coalitions with social communities?

- To provide a legitimizing form of power, where union action is framed as a 'sword of justice', with broad community support, and not simply as the vested interest of unions (Flanders 1970).
- To counter the effects of neoliberal globalization on workers and their communities, much better than the business and service model of unionism (Ross, 2007)
- To influence the public discourse on relevant policy issues and to cooperate with other civil society actors to put pressure on employers and governments. The *societal power resources theory* (Lehndorff, 2017:

«*There is Power in Coalition*»: the «Social Movement Unionism»

- an “organizational-maintenance strategy” to increase the labour movement’s organizing capacity, bargaining power, and social and political weight.
- its goal is “to change the entire society and to advance the interests of many who are not union members” on the basis of a “moral critique of the existing order” (Robinson, 1993)
- to go beyond the narrow, instrumental economism and sectionalism of “business unionism”; the workplace and methods of union activity, the collective bargaining process
- to attract, retain and mobilize potential adherents and constituents
- the only kind of unionism “capable of countering the effects of neoliberal globalization on workers and their communities” (Ross)

TU and Community Movements: why do they differ?

Dichotomy of actors and programmes	Trade Unions	Civil society organisations
<i>Constituency</i>	Large, employees and lower-middle class rooted	Small. “Reflexive”, educated middle-upper class
<i>Organizational Culture</i>	Solidarity on socio-economic basis	Filanthropy; Humanism; Charity
<i>Type of organization</i>	Strucurated and hierarchical	Spontaneous and voluntaristic
<i>Scope and scale</i>	Nation states	Trans-nations
<i>Strategy</i>	Broad; Multi-issues	Ad hoc issue
<i>Type of individual committment</i>	Instrumental/idealistic	Social
<i>Values</i>	Materialistic	“Moral”; Post-materialistic
<i>Horizon</i>	Stable; Middle-long term	Unstable; Short-term

Comparison of union-community coalitions

<p>Sources: Tattersall (2007) Hyman (2011) Frage, Heery, Turner (2015)</p>	<p><i>of influence</i> <i>To conduct common lobbying activity with other insider organisations</i></p>	<p><i>of protest</i> <i>To exert common pressure on state institutions to achieve new regulations and standards</i></p>
<p><i>Integrative</i> <i>TUs offer unconditional support to their non-labour partners</i></p>	<p><i>Business Unionism</i> German Sector TUs</p>	<p>Support coalitions</p>
<p><i>Common cause</i> <i>to identify separate but associated interests in joint cooperative campaigns</i></p>	<p><i>Integrative Unionism</i> UK UNISON US and Canadian TUs</p>	<p>Mutual and ad hoc coalitions</p>
<p><i>Vanguard</i> <i>TUs embody a general progressive or class interest to which other groups and institutions should lend support for their progressive</i></p>	<p>Support coalitions Mutual and ad hoc coalitions Deep coalitions</p>	<p><i>“Class opposition and militancy”</i> The old British NUM The French CGT CGIL</p>

Italian unionism and coalition building

- A country «with the least developed traditions of coalitions-building» (Frage, 2005). Italian unions have been considered by some less sensitive than other European unions in giving voice and representation to outsiders (Meardi 2012). Why?
- Because the TUs have «a tradition of broad ranging political and social activism that may serve to reduce the need for or interest in coalition with other institutions or movements» (Martinez Lucio, 1999)
- The CGIL: from the «transmission belt» party/union to the union autonomous «political subject», acting on a broader range of issues. based on confederalism, rejection of all corporatism and economistic sectorialism and aiming at wide-range «structural reforms». The «pan-unionism» in the 1970s
- “The use of campaigns and mass mobilization to support demands and initiatives in the industrial relations and political lobbying is nothing new in countries such as Belgium, France, **Italy**, Portugal and Spain” (Waddington et al., 2023)

The ambivalence of the Italian unionism from a «power resources» perspective

1. **Associative:** good (32% union density and > 11mln members)
2. **Organizational:** pretty good (human and financial resources; territorial settlement e servicing; CB coverage > 90%; mobilizing capacity in vanguarding collective actions)
3. **Institutional:** ambivalent (still good in some legal protection but declining in political recognition and popularity)
4. **Structural:** critical (“old-kind” membership composition; weak workplace settlement and in the new world of work)
5. **Societal:** declining popularity but great visibility and appreciation, in the case of CGIL, for heralding the social opposition

The CGIL strategies: frame, repertoire, practices

Internal strategies

- Servicing (legal advocacy; social protection and fiscal assistance)
- Heighten the presence of the trade union in the workplace
- Developing membership involvement and democracy
- More and better communication (offices, call centres, websites, etc.)
- Trade union research and training

External strategies

- Organising the no-unionised workers
- Big reforms: Jobs Plan, new Workers Statute, Welfare
- A new “labor internationalism” and rejection of whatever kind of protectionism, nationalism, withdrawing within national borders
- **Alliances/coalitions with social and community movements and campaigns for specific issues and under-represented target-groups**

The CGIL range of alliance and coalitions

- Feminism («Non una di meno»; «Belle Ciao»)
- LGBTQI+ (Gay Prides / anti-discrimination at the workplaces)
- Environmentalism (Fridays for Future)
- Immigration and anti-racism (Networks and campaigns)
- Legality (anti-mafia networks)
- Anti-right and anti-fascism (International Unions' Network)
- Alter-globalism (Genova, 2001) vs. fair globalisation (intern. Networks/campaigns)
- Peace (from Kosovo to Iraq to Ukraine to Palestine)
- Defence of the Republican Constitution and unity (against the project of the Regional «differentiated autonomy»)
- Against the right-wing Government (100 associations in the rally of the 7/10/2023)

A vanguard social unionism in a community coalition of protest

Within the social and community coalitions, the CGIL:

- is the association by far the most structured and capable to bear and pay the organizational and logistic costs of campaigns, petitions, mobilizations, events, demonstrations, rallies
- Searches for and establishes contact points with the other associations' leadership
- Set and leads the agenda of the mobilizations
- Uses the capillary network of its local and workplaces structures to supply the practical launch of massive national campaigns
- Put the very high visibility on the media, and also «charisma», of its leader to propagate the relevance of the coalition's campaigns
- With its primacy and hegemony in the social protest construction, it aims also to influence the center-left parties

Union and political perspective in the CGIL future

The policy

- The striking frequency of mobilizations undertaken over a broad range of issues
- A social movement union, very much oriented towards general and political issues
- The aggregative potential to replace and surrogate the current weakness of the political left
- A leadership-focused social unionism, where the popularity of the General Secretary plays a growing role

The questions

- If and to what extent this ambition will be able to hold up in the medium and long term,
- if the demonstrations, even very large on Saturday, could prove to be just as necessary and effective as those sectoral strikes,
- **If vanguarding the social opposition will be enough to compensate for the erosion of good and effective outcomes in the traditional wage and collective bargaining ambit**

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