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## Labour Relations and Social Movements in the 21st Century

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### 1. Introduction

Perhaps labour relations and social movements are today – more than ever before – two fields of decisive importance in contemporary sociology. In spite of being issues that can be treated autonomously, in a context of intense and ever-worsening austerity measures in many societies it makes sense, in fact, to think of them as interconnected. Besides, it is difficult to talk of a global crisis in capitalism, of an unemployment crisis, of a crisis in models of collective bargaining, and so on, without talking of the response strategies of society's citizens. So, for this purpose, we need to consider the “old” trade union organisations as well as the “new” ones, and to pay attention to the social networks which are emerging worldwide in the struggle for the right to employment and a dignified future. New groups, languages, proposals and rebels are emerging and, in many countries of the West, the overall society seems to be moving and asking for new agendas and political repertoires. The panorama of a deep economic crisis which in the last few decades has hit Europe and its Welfare state in particular has had an unprecedented impact on employment and social policies. The neoliberal model and the effects of deregulated and global finance not only question the “European social model” but push sectors of the labour force – with the youngest and well-qualified being prominent – into unemployment or precarious jobs.

This text aims to point out the main trends that have taken place in the labour field whilst simultaneously trying to understand what type of responses or ways ahead can be considered, namely of a socio-occupational nature, using the social movements as a starting point. The first part of the chapter centres on the transforming trends and processes associated with the labour market, the types of work and models of organisation of production. In the second part we focus on the most recent waves of protests and social movements, making reference to the experience and new forms of collective action. Our aim is to show the sociological and potential socio-political significance of these actions, particularly as a result of the interconnections that such movements express, both in the sphere of the workplace and industrial system or whether with broader social structures, with special emphasis on the middle classes and the threats of 'proletarianization' that presently hang over them.

Our argument is therefore the following: labour relations of our time are crossed by precariousness and by a new and growing “precariat” which also gave rise to new social movements and new forms of activism and protest. Thus labour relations and social

movements (the title of our article) have been pushed toward new ways and new discourses. In fact, the new socio-labour movements are movements of society, of a younger generation (largely of qualified young people connected to the university system) legitimately protesting against the lack of career opportunities, against the lack of jobs, against the irrationalities of nowadays economic austerity policies. The rapprochement between cultural criticism and social criticism (“critique artistique” vis-à-vis “la critique social”, quoting Boltanski and Chiapello, 2001) is therefore a logical consequence of contemporary voices and forms of protest.

## 2. The field of research in labour relations

Terminology such as "industrial relations", "labour relations", "work relations", "professional relations", "collective work relations", among others, has often been used by social scientists in an undifferentiated way. This can be explained by reasons that are connected with the plurality of the themes in analysis<sup>1</sup>. As it happens, historically the Anglo-Saxon term *industrial relations* has been favoured as a way of following the industrial movement that took hold in western countries, in which the production was largely ensured by an industrial apparatus and in which a significant part of the active population was involved in activities related to industry (Kerr *et al.*, 1960; Dunlop, 1993).

Nonetheless, whilst we agree with the meanings associated with the expression “industrial relations” – establishment of the rules of work (Dunlop), mechanisms of regulating work (*job regulation*), industrial democracy (Derber), the establishment of working conditions (Craig), negotiation relations (Laffer), exchange relations (Somers) – in our understanding the expression “labour relations” is more appropriate today than that of “industrial relations”. Not only because the evolution of an “industrial society” to a “service society” makes it less plausible to use the term “industry”, but because it permits two types of relations to be emphasised: on the one hand, we are dealing with relations *of* production contractually established between labour and capital, and that constitute, as a whole, a wage relation; on the other hand, we are faced with relations *in* production, which regulate the actual work carried out by workers during the working day and which include relations among the workers, as well as their relations with supervisors or managers according to the norms or regulations of the company (Burawoy, 1985; Santos, 2000; Ferreira e Costa, 1998/99: 144; Estanque, 2000; Costa, 2005).

Furthermore, we should reinforce that labour relations imply a relational dimension which involves individual and collective actors in work activity according to different levels of analysis: local, sectorial, regional, national, transnational or global. On the other hand, if it is true that labour relations have an important “value in use” in establishing consensuses (agreements) between the parties involved (unions and employers), we should also refer to the emphasis on conflict in the origins or the forms of power that are associated with it (Kahn-Freund, 1972; Barbash, 1984; Caire, 1991; Kahn-Freund, 1972; Rueschemeyer, 1986; Santos, 1994; 1995a; 2000; Estanque and Costa, 2011).

<sup>1</sup> Changes in labour market; trade unionism and social concertation; qualifications, competencies, and training of workers; new forms of work organisation; labour participation and social dialogue in companies; methodologies of analysis of the labour market; gender social relations; workplace conflicts; workplace accidents; social inequalities, atypical forms of employment; employment/unemployment, etc. (Ferreira e Costa, 1998/99: 142).

### 3. Labour metamorphoses: Fordism and its decline

As an activity conceived of by man, based on the production of material goods, the provision of services or on the exercise of functions with a view to obtaining results that have social utility and economic value (Freire, 1998: 27), work naturally involves different types of meanings associated with different types of relations: with nature, with production (of goods and merchandise for consumption), with services (provision of services between people), with the idea of transaction (exchange of material goods), with the notion of creation (work is invention and discovery), with spaces/institutions (organisations), etc. On the other hand, labour can also be distinguished from work. For Guy Standing, whilst labour “is about maximizing efficiency and competitiveness” and some of its characteristics are stress, burnout and the loss of control over time, “work captures the activities of necessity, surviving and reproducing, *and* personal development”. From this perspective, “in performing work a person has agency, a sense of self-determination” (Standing, 2009: 7).

The transformations of the world of work throughout the 20th Century, particularly in Europe, evidence a process of profound social change that calls into question the centrality of labour, and has brought about a new political lexicon: globalization, decentralization, flexibilization (Antunes, 1997; Costa, 2008). In the wake of the Second World War, the dominant model of labour relations, especially in the north of Europe, was based on trade unions and strong and centralised employers' associations that coordinated their performance capacity with that of the governments. The triumph of this model is inseparable from the role of the state because it meant changing from a competitive and purely commercial labour relation to a legally regulated model, giving rise to the idea that: “the guarantee of employment and the notion of employment – the indefinite contract – and social protection led to the so-called social citizenship in post-war Western Europe” (Oliveira and Carvalho, 2010: 27; Costa, 2008: 23-38). In this “golden age”, trade union movement acquired notable recognition and became an integral part of the national processes for the promotion of well-being, and, in truth, saw its status move from that of “movement” to one of social “partner”. In addition, norms of labour citizenship were defined in the place of work, and governments developed macroeconomic policies that were favourable to full employment (Ross and Martin, 1999a:7). Fordism was confirmed, therefore, as a dominant wage relation model, based on three levels: firstly, as a general principle of work organisation (or *industrial paradigm*), it was an extension of Taylorism through mechanisation and mass consumption; secondly, as a macroeconomic structure (or *regime of accumulation*), it implied that the productivity profits resulting from its organisational principles benefited from the growth of investment financed by the profits, and the growth of the purchasing power of the wage-earning workers; thirdly, as a *form of regulation*, Fordism implied long-term contracting of the wage relation, with strict limitations in relation to dismissals, as well as a programme of growth in salaries indexed to inflation and productivity (Lipietz, 1992; 1996). To these three aspects, Bob Jessop adds a fourth that sees Fordism as a pattern of institutional integration and social cohesion, and considers “the consumption of standardized mass commodities in nuclear family households and the provision of standardized collective goods and services by the bureaucratic state” (Jessop, 1994: 254).

With the oil crisis in the 1970s there began a gradual decline in working conditions and an increase in unemployment that steadily worsened the state fiscal crises. At the same time the

role of the state, public policies and trade unions were called into question. In the United Kingdom, for example, the government of Margaret Thatcher adopted policies centred on flexibility and deregulation that came together with restrictive legislation on trade union influence. Between 1980 and 1993, the introduction of eight laws aimed at regulating trade union activity (Waddington, 1995: 31 ss.), had the immediate effect of validating the market and the individual and the isolation of the worker in any social context (Beynon, 1999: 274-275). Simultaneously, the decline of Fordism paved the way for new frameworks and began what would become the most profound reorganisation of labour market since the post-war era: decentralised production, greater specialisation, technological innovation, flexibilization, semi-autonomous teams (Toyotism), new qualifications, multiplication of contractual forms, sub-contracting, models of *lean production*, new techniques of production management (*just-in-time*), *total quality management*, reengineering, externalization and *outsourcing*, teamwork, etc. (Hyman, 1994 and 2004; Amin, 1994; Womack, Jones and Roos, 1990; Costa, 2008).

Such trends created further impacts produced by the transformation of global capitalism, among these, the action of multinationals, which change national economies and complicate trade union action; the increase of structural unemployment, a catalyst for processes of social exclusion; the relocation of productive processes and the predominance of financial markets over the productive markets; an increasing fragmentation of labour markets, which maintain sections of downtrodden workforce below the poverty line; the development of a mass culture dominated by a consumerist ideology and by using credit for consumption. (Santos, 1995b; 2006). It was evident throughout the first decade of the 21st Century that the new forms of labour relations meant an increase in precariousness, whether in Portugal or in Europe: receipts for the self-employed (or better, false receipts)<sup>2</sup>, short term contracts, temporary work, part-time work, illegal work in the informal economy<sup>3</sup>, etc., are just a few types among a wider range of new forms of labour relations (Antunes, 2006; Aubenais, 2010) in the 21st Century. It is not surprising, therefore, that throughout the last decade, opposing theses have been identified in relation to the position/centrality of labour in society.<sup>4</sup>

These trends are a long way from confirming the *end of work* or, in other words, the fragmentation of the wage society into “non-class of non-workers” (André Gorz), although one can recognise the lesser importance of labour to the definition and restructuring of individual identity and its difficulty in locating social bonds (Claus Offe; Jeremy Rifkin; Ulrich Beck; Dominique Méda). Job becomes a benefit that is increasingly scarce, but this has not reduced the significance of work and has only served to highlight its role as a factor that bestows dignity and human rights. Even considering the virtuality of the information society (Manuel Castells), the aforementioned fragmentation and volatility of the processes and forms of work and the “post-industrial” character of Western societies, it is worth noting, in line with institutions such as ILO, that “labour is not a commodity” and that there

<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of this phenomenon - which in Portugal amounts to 900,000 people - cf. AAVV (2009).

<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that in Portugal the informal economy represents about a ¼ of the Portuguese GNP. As Dornelas *et al.* (2011: 16) indicate, the amount of work which is not declared illustrates, above all, motivations that are more economic than social and affect even further the different categories the further these are found to be from typical and protected employment. Furthermore, it is part (16%) of non-paid work carried out in the formal sector of the formal economy.

<sup>4</sup> For a more developed analysis of these theses, cf. Toni (2003).



is not an alternative to the civilization of work, even though its forms are turning out to be increasingly unstable and multifaceted. It is undeniable that salaried work has become the stage of negative individualism, of precariousness and has been losing consistency, stability and even dignity as it is mentioned by the Decent Work Agenda and other ILO programs (Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). But as many engaged academics have pointed out, work remains at the centre of social conflicts and present day political struggles. It is necessary, therefore, to rediscover and reinforce its role as the glue of society, that is to say, as a decisive space in the defence of social cohesion and the exercise of citizenship, revitalising the mechanisms of dialogue and consensus by way of a new social contract that consolidates democracy (Robert Castel, 1998; Santos, 1998)<sup>5</sup>.

#### 4. Precariousness and the challenges of collective action

The trends of productive restructuring, the reorganisation of labour relations and metabolism which have been taking place in our societies, as well as their cycles and fluctuations between crises and social dumping, on the one hand, and euphoric consumerism and growth on the other, can be understood as situations that are innate to the very structure of modern capitalism. The logic of accumulation and the regulation mechanisms of the economic system have, in spite of everything, demonstrated a huge inventive capacity in resorting to diverse ways of mediation that as a general rule are able to ensure their reproduction, despite the suffering that this may involve for the dispossessed classes. As Ricardo Antunes has noted, “there has been a decrease in the traditional working class. But, simultaneously, a significant *subproletarianization* of work has been carried out, resulting from diverse forms of part-time, precarious, informal, subcontracted work, etc. There has taken place, therefore, a significant *heterogenization*, *complexification* and *fragmentation* of work” (Antunes, 1999:209).

Thus, not only did the potential of work not disappear but its central importance was reinforced. This is the perspective we subscribe. Besides production and development, labour relations remains a decisive space for identity construction, a field for the affirmation of qualifications, a source from which rights and citizenship spring. When workers weep at the doors of factories which have closed down it is not only because they have lost their source of income. It is because their very human dignity has been deeply wounded. In other words, labour still is a vital dimension of sociability that connects the individual to nature and society. For this reason we should assert that the withdrawal of conditions for security and stability in labour relations can only result in wearing out the “social fabric” (that is, the structuring process of the whole society) with all the risks that this involves, whether for economic activity or the lives of people.

We already know the devastating results of “wild capitalism” in the 19th Century whose process of commercial exploitation has meant the transmutation of the market economy to a market society with labour being stripped of its human character and dignity. And in 20th

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<sup>5</sup> In the terms of this contract: i) the work should be democratically shared (the strengthening of *labour standards* is crucial in this respect); ii) its polymorphism should be recognised (a minimum level of inclusion is necessary for atypical forms of work); iii) and trade union movement should be reinvented (whether intervening at different scales and not only at the local/national level, or promoting any global alternative)

Century Europe, with the promising experience of “thirty glorious years” faded away, neoliberalism again subjugated economic activity to the power of the markets (Polanyi, 1980). All this has taken place under an ideological discourse that has led us to believe that work has become something intangible, ethereal and completely dehumanised, that can be summed up as a set of indices and statistical indicators. If it is true that in the middle of the last century the advent of the Welfare state was able to limit the excesses of wild capitalism, sixty years later we are again witnessing the collapse of this redistributive model and with it the worsening of the social condition of the working class (including sectors of the salaried middle class).

At the present time, the lowest position in the social pyramid appears to be occupied by those working in *precarious positions*, and this is the segment that, as a matter of fact, is “dragging to the bottom” the strategic role of the middle classes as the functional *buffer zones* or *service classes* of Western democracies (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1993; Estanque, 2005). As Standing (2009: 109-114) noted, this involves a growing legion of people that move between insecure and badly paid jobs (in some countries the immigrant population is an example) who have no idea what job security is, who do not use the title professional to say what they do and who make up the vast world of the “informal economy” in which the word “rights” is put to one side: “flexi-workers” or “generation Y” (born after 1980) are but two of the labels to designate a new precarious class which uses a new language – emails, sms, Facebook, etc. – that sometimes makes of them a “cibertariat” (Huws, 2003). If citizenship were defined in terms of occupational rights, then this *precarious class* would lack citizenship. The precarious worker “does not have a material basis, or the occupational space, to develop leisure and participate politically”. In this sense, the *precarious class* “does not have freedom because it lacks security” (Standing, 2009: 314).

Below the precarious workers, at the “level of junk” (to use an expression that, sadly, has been popularised by the *rating* agencies to discredit the economies that do not adhere to the “law of the markets”), there are only the unemployed and the *detached*. On the one hand, the unemployed suffer from lack of opportunities yielded by the market. On the other hand, the *detached* are also a growing category, without access to state benefits, and live in a state of chronic poverty in underground railway stations, under bridges or in city parks and who, as Standing notes (2009: 115), apart from having the term *lumpenproletariat* (Marx) applied to them, are not wanted as neighbours.

In a notable work about the changes in the world of labour, Serge Paugam (2000) proposes a typification of precariousness, making reference to: a) a *secure integration*, which corresponds to a double security, firstly, the material and symbolic recognition derived from work and, secondly, the social protection associated with a stable job and the supporting mechanisms which confer stability (typical of Fordism). However, at the turn of the century the scenario of labour was to open up into new forms of contractualization and the exercise of working activity, resulting in ways of integration that were increasingly precarious: b) *uncertain integration*, which corresponds to a state of satisfaction with work but with instability of employment (this is the case of companies in difficulties, more or less condemned to reducing full time positions or to closure); c) *labour integration*, which corresponds to dissatisfaction with work, but stability of employment (it is the case of companies that go through restructuring of the productive system but remain solid); d) *disqualifying integration*, which corresponds to dissatisfaction with labour and instability of employment (professional precariousness being the most notable form, multinational companies, where constant danger of displacement exists, or of companies that offer part-time work, for example).

These situations, that ten years ago were considered “deviations” or included in so-called “atypical work”, have rapidly evolved into *a new pattern* which, despite considerable differences in the situations that exist between them, share the characteristic of precariousness as a common denominator, and are associated with contexts of fear and complete worker dependence. This precarious proletariat or this “class” (between commas), as discussed by Giovanni Alves, is composed of individual “men and women toyed with in the social world of capital, dispossessed, subordinated and immersed in the contingencies of life and the vagaries of the market”, the subject of fetishism and the unfamiliar that pushes the individual into “subordination, chance and contingency, insecurity and existential lack of control, incommunicability, corrosion of character, aimlessness and suffering” (Alves, 2009: 81-89). It is a social condition of great fragility that has come to be structured in the shadow of the fragmentation of work in global capitalism and that has led workers, in a first phase, to a state of social disillusionment that has culminated in the drastic reduction in the levels of civic, associative and political participation, and who remain paralysed by fear, by the constraints that are exerted at work but which have an impact on all areas of social life, from the factory to the community, from the company to the family (Estanque, 2000; Aubenas, 2010).

## 5. Labour market indicators

Looking at some of the indicators of the labour market – such as salaries, fixed-term contracts or the phenomenon of unemployment – is also revealing of the difficulties that are experienced in the professional field. As a starting point, it is important to point out that labour relations systems (working conditions, employment legislation, etc.) are not uniform, either internationally or even at the European level. Nevertheless, worrying tendencies can be identified.

For example, about income levels, the cuts in salaries are striking, particularly among the public sector workers of the more fragile economies (Greece, Ireland, Portugal are some of the most cited examples in the context of the EU). In 2011, in the case of Portugal, public sector workers had their salaries cut by up to 10% and saw their Christmas subsidy reduced by 50%. Furthermore, in the same country for 2012 and 2013, public sector subsidies for Christmas and summer – which have been the result of workers victories for over 30 years – will be cut completely. So the severe austerity measures that affect public sector workers (including both active and retired workers, with ramifications on the lives of approximately 3 million people) are a clear demonstration of the deficit of social justice in the wage relation and its extension to the private sector is a strong possibility (Reis, 2009: 11; Reis & Rodrigues, 2011; Costa, 2012).

In the context of the economic crisis the minimum wage will therefore be of further importance. It is basic thinking to remember that this instrument of policy, apart from being an important source of social justice, may also constitute indispensable financial support that will allow many families to survive. For the workers, the risk of poverty in Portugal is 12% (correspondent to 2/3 of the risk of total poverty<sup>6</sup>), whereas in Europe it is 8% (half of the risk of total poverty), which shows that in Portugal the salaries are too low to sufficiently deal with situations of poverty risk (Dornelas *et al.*, 2011: 18; Caleiras, 2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Which is now around 18% after social transferences by the state. Before those transferences the poverty risk is, according to Eurostat, about 42% (PORDATA, 2011).



Just like the salaries, the short-term contracts (for periods of 6 months, generally speaking) also point to precariousness lying ahead. Again, taking into account the Portuguese labour context, between 1999 and 2007 there was an increase in the probability of short-term contracts being signed and maintained for a longer period of time. Given the dynamics of starting an active life, this phenomenon particularly affected young workers, but has also come to affect workers of all ages. Furthermore, in the service sector flexibilization has been especially evident through the use of fixed-term contracts, permitting greater rotation of employment<sup>7</sup>. Thus, “this excessive rotation reduces the incentive to invest in education and training on the part of companies and workers, and intensify the polarisation of the labour market, affecting negatively the accumulation of human capital of the economy” (Reis, 2009: 12).

Taken as a whole, short-term contracts comprise more than 20% of wage earners, but the younger generations in particular, with high levels of education, this situation is much more concerning. The percentage of precarious employment (if we add short-term contracts, the self-employed, temporary workers and part-time work) is now close to 30% of total employment. According to official sources, in 2010 there were 37,6% of workers between the ages of 15- 34 working on fixed-term contracts, whereas if we consider the age group between 15 - 24 years old this percentage is close to 50% (INE, 2010; Carmo, 2010). In the last decade, jobs offering permanent contracts have decreased at the same pace as fixed-term contracts have increased. This type of contract has steadily increased in all age groups, with the younger generation between 15 - 24 years of age (today popularly known as the *Geração à Rasca* - “Desperate Generation”)<sup>8</sup> bearing the brunt of this, which is likewise happening in many other European countries (Estanque, 2012).

But today the phenomenon of unemployment is more visible than ever. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), unemployment on a global level in 2010 (in spite of a partial recovery after the sub-prime crisis in 2008) remained at high levels, reaching 205 million, with more than 27.5 million unemployed in 2010 than in 2007 (ILO, 2011: 12). According to Eurostat (2011c), just in the EU27, in August 2011, 22,785 million men and women were unemployed (with 15,739 million unemployed in “Eurozone” countries).

In Portugal, unemployment figures went from 525 thousands (10,1%), in December 2009, to 547 thousands (11%), in December 2010. At this time (December 2010), unemployment rate in the Eurozone was 10% and in the UE/27 it was 9,6% (Eurostat, 2011a). On year later, in December 2011, the percentage of unemployed in Portugal was 13,6%, whilst the average in the Eurozone was 10,4% and in the UE/27 it was 9,9% (Eurostat, 2012a). But according to the National Statistics Institute (INE), in the last quarter of 2011 the unemployment rate reached even at 14%, the highest on record, affecting 771,000 people. However, , the evolution of unemployment goes very quickly, standing at 14.8% in January 2012 (Eurostat, 2012b).

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<sup>7</sup> Mário Centeno, in interview with the newspaper *Público*, 7/02/2011. See also Centeno and Novo (2008b: 146).

<sup>8</sup> Since the 12th March 2011, this class of precarious workers has identified itself with the 'Desperate Generation' due to the huge demonstration (that brought together 300,000 people in Lisbon and other cities) that was organised by a group of young people through Facebook, and which, according to several commentators, marked a turning point in the forms of collective action and established itself as a new phenomenon on the national political scene.

Unemployment figures force us to emphasize, whether in terms of length or age groups that it is young people (which are the better qualified) who are particularly affected. In truth, the tendency for an increase in unemployment appears clear, above all the long-term unemployed<sup>9</sup> which cannot be disassociated from, as hitherto mentioned, the high percentage of precarious jobs in Portugal. Furthermore, at the heart of companies low levels of adaptability to work and to working time are evident, which has led to more dismissals, facilitated precarious contracts and made the balance between professional and family life more difficult (Dornelas, 2009: 128-129).

Data from the ILO indicate that unemployment among Portuguese young people (15 to 24 years old) increased from 16,6 % before the crisis to 22,3 % in 2010, following countries such as Slovakia (33,6 %), Estonia (33 %) or Greece (32,9 %). Even worse, in the first quarter of 2011, the youth unemployment rate in Portugal jumped to 27,8% (INE, 2011: 2). According INE, of the 609,400 unemployed people in the third quarter of 2010, 285,400 were young people below the age of 34. Here (youth unemployment) we can also include graduate unemployment: if in 2000 the number of unemployed graduates was 83,000, in 2010 this had risen to 190,000. These numbers show, therefore, that unemployment among young graduates has worsened in recent years, rising to 55,000 (in 2010), although it is known that graduates receive higher salaries and spend less time being unemployed or working in precarious employment than the rest. Regardless, whether it is unemployment or temporary contracts the young are especially hard hit (INE, 2011).

## 6. Subjective attitudes

In a climate of economic crisis like this, the indices of satisfaction, loyalty and labour cohesion tend, as is expected, to decrease. In the Portuguese case, this has actually happened. As is stated in the 2011 report of the National Observatory for Human Resources (ONRH), from 2009 to 2010 the level of satisfaction of Portuguese workers dropped 1,2%, their loyalty to the company they worked for fell 1,3%, and the involvement of employees with organisations fell 0,8%. Of the 12 indices evaluated by ONRH, all decreased in relation to 2009. The problem of security has been pointed to as the principal concern of Portuguese workers. In a recent international study, Skidmore and Bound (2008) analyse indices such as: (i) the ability of the worker to influence working conditions (working environment); (ii) worker autonomy; (iii) creativity in the workplace, and they found that the Iberian countries (Portugal, Spain) and others in the south of Europe contrasted significantly with countries in the north of Europe. Considering the responses to these indicators, the indices for well-being and interpersonal confidence were found to be very low (above all in the case of Portugal) in addition to showing a close correlation with democracy in the workplace and with mechanisms of dialogue and participation (also very low).

Other studies have attempted to measure the happiness of citizens based on social psychology models (Easterlin, 2001 and 2005; Veernhoven & Hagerty, 2006; Veernhoven, 2011). A recent study (conducted by Rui Brites da Silva) showed that, in terms of the index of subjective well-being, the Portuguese occupy a position in the second half of the table. In Veernhoven's *ranking* for the period 2000-2009, Portugal is in 79th place (with 5.7 points on a

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<sup>9</sup> In the 3rd quarter of 2010, there were nearly 340,000 long-term unemployed in Portugal (INE, 2010).

scale from 0 to 10) among 149 countries, with the same number of points as Belarus, Djibouti, Egypt, Mongolia, Nigeria and Romania. The first places are occupied by Costa Rica (1st, with 8.5 points on the same scale), Denmark (2nd), Iceland (3rd), Canada (4th), and Finland (5th). Furthermore, this study, which was not only supported by these indicators but also by the report of the “Stiglitz Commission”<sup>10</sup> presents results of the subjective well-being index, thereby attempting to combine both the subjective and objective dimensions of happiness. Despite its limitations, the criteria used show a significant consistency, with the subjective evaluation of those questioned being confirmed in the data of the *European Social Survey* (ESS). In addition, it was possible, based on these findings, to conclude that the subjective well-being of the Portuguese decreased when moving from north to the south of the country, that the indices of happiness are higher in men than they are in women, and that the lowest indices of well-being are to be found in the older age groups, especially in females (Silva, 2011: 200-205).

To these data can be added others, conducted by various international bodies, to illustrate the heightened climate of mistrust on the part of citizens towards institutions, the functioning of the political system, and who express a general feeling of scepticism about the democratic system in such fundamental areas such as governance, the economic situation, and the system of justice. This scepticism is also expressed in their opinions about the ability of the present leadership and the “political elite” in general, demonstrating once again the growing gap between citizens and political life and the risk this represents for the representative democracy. The results of the (ESS) aimed at evaluating the degree of satisfaction of citizens (using a scale from 0 = extremely satisfied to 10 = extremely dissatisfied) throughout the first decade of this century. The Portuguese showed themselves to be moderately satisfied with their life conditions, but with percentages clearly below the average of EU countries, results that were more notable when compared to those of northern Europe (Vala *et al.*, 2010). As for the economic situation of the country, the levels of dissatisfaction are clearly more apparent, with a tendency to increase as the successive results of the four questionnaires applied over the ten-year period were collected.

As for the degree of satisfaction in relation to the way the government is performing, results fluctuate somewhat in accordance with political cycles (with higher indices of dissatisfaction in 2002 and 2008), but which, generally speaking, point to negative evaluations well above the EU average, with the total of negative percentages (between 0 and 4) either coming close to or exceeding 50%, and rising to 64,2% in 2004 and 66,6% in 2008. This mistrust of the

<sup>10</sup> In fact this commission was constituted, apart from Joseph Stiglitz, by Amartya Sen and J.P. Fitoussi and other academics and specialists, a group promoted by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, with the team in its first report having suggested new initiatives and criteria to evaluate economic performance, such as: “- using other indicators apart from GNP in national expenditure; - verifying the performance of basic sectors like health and education; - considering domestic activities and taking into account the life patterns of people; - adding information about wealth distribution and income; including activities outside the market. An innovation proposed by the report is the net and not gross evaluation of economic activities, in a way that allows the extraction of natural resources, the environmental impacts caused by the production or use of *stocks* to be taken into account”. In: site “Sustainable planet”, accessed on 7/09/2011:

<http://planetasustentavel.abril.com.br/noticia/desenvolvimento/comissao-stiglitz-sen-fitoussi-pib-489751.shtml>

government is only exceeded when treating the degree of confidence in politicians. In this case, totalling up the negative figures (between 0 and 4 on the scale), for 2004 we obtain 76.6% and 81.2% for 2008, in addition to the fact that the negative results are significantly higher in Portugal than the average for the other countries. It can also be noted, with regard to the little confidence in the “political class”, that the indicator “no confidence whatsoever” in 2002 obtained 17.2% of responses (as opposed to an average of 11.8% in other countries), rising to 25.3%, 25.7% and 29.4% respectively in 2004, 2006 and 2008, therefore remaining about 10% above the average. It can be noted that this low confidence (in government and politicians) also extends to social confidence (interpersonal and in the goodwill of others) and institutional issues (national parliament). As referred to in a comparative study in the European context, the Scandinavian countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden) and Switzerland, express the highest levels of confidence on these two levels, whilst Portugal, Spain and Eastern European countries (notably Poland, Hungary and Slovenia) express the opposite, demonstrating very low levels of confidence (Correia Silva, 2011: 51-57).

## 7. Precariousness and new social movements (NSMs)

The indicators above clearly show the seriousness of the social situation in European countries. The loss of trust in the system represents a threat to social cohesion and to stability which, in spite of everything, has characterised Western democracies since the end of the Second World War. All the changes that have taken place in the area of the economy in the last few decades have been developed in order to hamper or reverse the old European social model, which in the past was deemed irreversible and an example for other continents to follow. However, the most recent trends appear to surprise even the most sceptical, given the magnitude of the problems now emerging. One of the reasons that the point we have reached is so worrying is because, once again, the issue of labour and the access to employment are again at the centre of controversy and social conflict. In the last fifty years, not only have Western economies and systems of employment become tertiary but the standardised and stable forms of professional practice have also been dismantled or are in the process of being so, as we have previously seen. It can be said that with the stagnation of industrial production and the consolidation of Fordism (in the private and public sectors) the old labour conflict has become “depoliticised” and has gradually become a “manageable” factor in the demanding productive sphere. In a certain sense, we have witnessed a process of institutionalisation in which dialogue and negotiation have substituted the struggle of the working class and trade unions, weakening therefore the dynamic of the trade union as a *movement*. Although it would be an exaggeration to suggest that the battles of trade unionism disappeared in order to give their leaders a greater role and more flexibility to negotiate, the fact is that trade unionism, to a large extent, became bureaucratic, “softer” and more “compliant” as its foundations of support converted from traditional manual workers to the new middle “service class” (Goldthorpe). It is in this sense that we can assert that trade union action became “depoliticised” so as to give a role to “social concertation” and to the corporative spirit. Yet this tendency was found to be on the verge of saturation point (Estanque and Costa, 2011).

If one can confirm that the socio-occupational situation is becoming increasingly worse (on both the objective and subjective levels), it can be said that discontentment will increase to



give rise to conflict. So, the argument we would like to stress is that the intensification and expansion of precariousness, the fragmentation of productive processes, and the disregarding of rights and dignity associated with labour relations, are creating a new form of struggle which is based around work and the struggles for the recovery of its dignity will affirm a new state of politicisation. This appears to be happening through new socio-occupational movements that are presently raging across societies on a global level.

Social movements are sometimes classified as “old” and “new”, that is, between the dynamics of a socioeconomic base (the labour movement) or the dynamics of a sociocultural base (student movements, environmentalists, pacifists, feminists, etc). This distinction can be adapted to the present discussion given it is about the connections between the field of labour and the activists uprising from the broader sphere of society (Touraine, 1981; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Alvarez *et al.*, 2000; Santos, 2004). Current social protests indicate that the preceding period has been overcome. That is to say, the weakness, the helplessness and the fear that paralysed any possible response on the part of the workforce reached the end. The excluded, unemployed and segments of skilled youth, and those that turn away from trade union organisations seems to resist and want to struggle again. So, these recent social trends seems to reflect a new interconnection between two sides: the sociocultural side, related to the students and well educated segments; and the labour side, with the new “precariat” filed by those coming from the work field at the costs of the growing flexibility, unemployment and precariousness. Both sectors seem to become more united as they have been demonstrating together along 2011 in several countries.

In this sense it is necessary to realign the discussion about the NSMs and draw it toward issues about changes in labour relations. In fact, although sociology of work and industrial relations have established an autonomous theoretical framework, the present approach prefers to draw on some of the classic discussions on the “social question” - which throughout the 19th Century so greatly inspired the main thinkers in the social sciences - by taking up the idea of the centrality of labour and seeking to interpret the current process of reorganisation of labour relations as a driving force of a “new social question” (Estanque, 2007). In other words, this means a process that not only questions the productive system and the rights of workers as such, but above all that threatens the social cohesion, the viability of the economic system, and the future of Europe and representative democracy itself (Castel, 1998; Estanque and Costa, 2011).

Our perspective is inspired by the legacy of the 60s and the 70s but to which is added the features of innovation that have appeared with the most recent movements in the cyberspace era. Clearly, the historical past cannot be wiped clean and it would be naive to believe that this would be possible. Therefore, it is necessary to learn from theoretical reflection what such experiences give rise to, first of all because many of the social scientists that dedicate themselves to the study of these phenomena were themselves involved as activists in these movements. Today, just like yesterday, it is theoretical reflection that pursues the dynamics of societies and the sociopolitical breakdowns that in general are imposed by the NSMs. So we continue to seek in the social responses the inspiring sources of critical thinking and the emancipatory alternatives of our times (Santos, 2004, 2005 e 2011). Apart from the aforementioned division between 'old' and 'new' movements, that is to say, between the movements of a socioeconomic base, materialist and classist (of which the old labour movement is the paradigmatic example) and the movements that are



fundamentally of a sociocultural base, post-materialist and interclassist (of which the environmentalists, feminists, pacifists, students, etc. are examples), we can associate each one of these two categories to two logics pointed up by Boltanski and Chiapello (2001): 'social' criticism essentially led by the labour and trade union movement, and 'artistic' (or aesthetic) criticism led by the NSMs. Apart from this, it is important not to forget the connections that both types maintain with distinct segments of class that feed their composition and dynamism.

## 8. Social movements and the radicalism of the middle class

While trade unions and labour fields were in the past closely tied to the working class, social movements of the sixties, despite being heterogeneous, can be readily associated with the middle class. We are aware that this connection with the middle class is not as obvious as it was the working class toward trade union movement in the past. In fact, apart from "class determinism" being a misleading premise, the heterogeneity and the internal fragmentation of both the "middle classes" and "working class" strips away the sense of any cause-effect relation in this respect. What happens is that certain class groups – or if we prefer, some specific social segments – located themselves in the most general framework of the social structure, are to be found in such particular conditions, that they can trigger shared subjectivities and collective attitudes characterised by common concerns, therefore favouring collective action. Besides, cultural environments and socialising contexts are decisive to forge identities or at least shared forms of identification in conditions which give rise to social movements: identity, opposition to a recognised adversary and a common idea (principle of *totality*) in relation to an alternative constitute three of the principles pointed to by Alain Touraine (1981 and 2006) as decisive criteria in defining a social movement (Tilly, 1978 and 1996).

The NSMs that started forty years ago were, undoubtedly, notable examples of an active role of the middle class strata (probably richer in cultural capital than economic capital), where in fact the better educated young people played a decisive role. The fact that students activism took root in a place which, at that time, was almost exclusively dominated by the children of the dominant elite, should not detract from the importance of its tremendously transforming and progressive impact. It can be said that the patterns of taste brought about by these movements – in aesthetics, in dress, in music, in literary and intellectual interests, in the expression of sexuality, etc. – not only changed everyday life and the life styles of the following generations but also gave new forms to the public and political sphere. The importance of the so called *artistic criticism* fell within the *culturalist* approach that these movements set in motion, putting forward new readings on the capitalist system and pressurising representative democracy to redefine its procedures and forms of exercising power. It is true that the institutional responses that followed in the West – or precisely because of them – illustrated a huge regenerative capacity of capitalism, which allow for the creation of new values, discourses, repertoires, and innovative forms of collective action (Eder, 2001; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2001; Chauvel, 2006; Estanque, 2012).

Social change in industrial societies throughout the 20th Century was generally perceived according to inherited rival perspectives, sometimes positivism, sometimes Marxism or far-left attitudes. However, the fact is that in actual social life both collective battles and social movements struggles as well as opportunities and social mobility processes brought about

by an open class system contributed to the restructuring of the system and to the growth of the middle class. The *culturalist approach* of the middle class, associated with the rise in new social movements, allowed for the first time for this class to be viewed in a positive and not a pejorative manner. The so called *middle class radicalism*, referred to as an expression of the student movements of the sixties (Parkin, 1968; Barker, 2008; Estanque and Bebian, 2007) opened up a new perspective on this class, and did away with the old arguments of “individualism” and becoming part of the Bourgeoisie which obscured sociological and political meaning of these segments. And today, at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st Century, European reality has once again exposed certain preconceived ideas about this class: the traditional idea that the middle class is, above all, characterised by its *cultural good will* that tends to imitate the habits and the tastes of the elite, but is merely a pale imitation; the idea of “modest” tastes, fake imitations in opposition to authenticity, exemplifying the desire to even out inconsistencies in *status*, and an obsessive adherence to the *status quo*, all appear to show, at the present time, an image which is, to say the least, exaggerated and needs to be revised (Bourdieu, 1979).

It is important to remember in relation to this that Portuguese society was clearly not, and never had been, in tune with the problems of the more advanced countries in Europe. Therefore, when the students at the Sorbonne demanded more democracy, rights and sexual freedom within an established democratic regime, the Portuguese people were struggling for basic political freedom, for the end of the colonial war and Salazar's repressive regime. At that time, there was no place for either old or new movements in Portugal. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that in the sixties the salaried middle class in Portugal was practically non-existent. Even the student movements and academic battles of this decade were organised by university students – many of them politicised and sensitive to the tendencies of activism and the cultural and musical influences of the era – who were, essentially, the offspring of the privileged elite.

In developed Europe, the middle class “entrenched” in power for the last forty years, and the first generation to benefit from the *Welfare State*, created a “rebellious” generation. It was this, in fact, that turned the “youth” into a new “social actor” whose cultural dissent led to an important political turning point in the West, and with it, to a new aesthetic and sociocultural awareness, which broke with “petit bourgeoisie” values and the conventional mentality of the “well-behaved” middle class. The NSMs sowed the seeds of a new irreverence which was disseminated from the universities (Barker, 2008). However, if in 1968 the struggle of the student movement in Paris (the spokespersons of *artistic criticism*) languished when the alliance between trade unions and workers political parties (the so called *social criticism*) collapsed, in today's world the organisers of the protests no longer limit themselves to defending *post-materialist* values – rather they struggle with the difficulties of entering the labour market, or with the growing precariousness that denies them a decent future and dignified employment. Furthermore, it is no longer the students on one side and the workers on the other, but in fact a whole group of social segments affected by insecurity, precariousness, a lack of access to an opportunity for a stable future, hence the confluence of students and workers recently graduated from universities, diverse groups of discarded employees, workers who retired early, as well as the victims of austerity and the restructuring of the social state. It is in this context that we find conditions which are especially propitious for creating a potentially strong alliance between the labour field and the student among younger population (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2001; Estanque, 2008).

Meanwhile, in the case of Portugal, student's population suffered very deep changes. It is no more just the elite's children but – especially after Bologna process – massive sons of middle and lower strata that have entered the universities, while post-graduate programmes attract more and more professionals and workers trying to upgrade their skills and put forward new steps in their careers. As a result, we assist to a deep process of recomposition of this population in which youth life styles become mixture with middle age workers having in common the some feelings of discontent and disappointment toward labour market. Therefore, in the current context of social discontent it is important to understand the lines of structuration of the new rebels, not on the basis of the same avant-garde assumptions that enthused past generations but from its interconnections with the more general process of change in contemporary societies. If the social movements of the past proved to be so inspiring as to instil new ideas and greater intensity in Western democracies, the NSMs of the 21st Century place on the agenda new forms of activism that a short while ago were virtually unknown, but this novelty converges with some forms of continuity. In the following topic we will look at some of these forms.

## 9. Precariousness, revolutions and new forms of rebellion

Social convulsions and their demands can be – totally or partially, directly or indirectly, in the short or the medium term – absorbed by the existing institutions (which is common and normal in solid democracies) or openly repressed and contested by the established order (which, naturally, is more common in dictatorial regimes). This means that social movements can both force important political and institutional reforms and bring about ruptures and violent revolutions. Generally, we can speak about revolutions when the increasing levels of discontent and popular pressure go hand in hand with the discrediting of the elites or oligarchies in power, whilst simultaneously a new class (or organised group) with ambition and the conditions to achieve political power is rising. Charles Tilly points to three conditions in order to make sense to speak of revolutions: (1) when clear discrepancies are played out between what the states demands of their better organised citizens and that which they can demand them to do; (2) when states present their citizens with demands that threaten collective identities or violate rights connected to these identities; and (3) when the power of governments visibly diminishes in relation to the growing strength of their opponents (Tilly, 1996: 284). On the other hand, as previously shown, social movements can have political or sociocultural power of great significance without this resulting in a revolution. There are numerous examples of peaceful transitions of authoritarian systems to democratic regimes but this rarely happens without the people taking to the streets. Collective action and grassroots movements in struggles were decisive in the democratic wave in the transition of southern Europe countries (Huntington, 1991; Nunes, 2003; Freire, 2005), although, as we saw in relation to the NSMs of the sixties, in consolidated democracies the explicit aims can be defeated, even though social change subsequently takes place, on the cultural level and in values in a process that is refracted along history (Carmo, 2000; Goffman & Joy, 2007; Barker, 2008).

What is intended here is to present a common thread that allows us to question the connecting features between different and distant phenomena to one another, whether in space or in time. We have already referred to past European experiences of the 20th Century

that we think still retain a significant place as collective memory in terms of heritage for today's generations. It is now necessary for us to discuss possible connections between a range of experiences that have taken place extremely recently and on various continents. Since March 2011, the world has witnessed a new wave of rebellions and movements that have affected countries and cultures, including those where only but a short time ago any idea of political change was unimaginable. The so-called "Arab Spring" revealed to an astonished West a wave of movements founded at the heart of extremely repressive Islamic regimes, many of which have given rise to political revolutions whose outcomes are still unknown but where the desire for liberty and democracy are crucial. Although social climate and the forms of protest – in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Yemen and Libya – have, in theory, few similarities with the situation in Europe and the Western world, there are at least three aspects that these movements have in common with those that have very recently been sweeping across public squares and cities in the West: (1) the fact that they have, above all, been organised by educated young people; (2) the central concern of the protesters with the difficulties in finding employment and social justice; and (3) the use of Internet as their main tool for both organization and public condemnations, as well as using satellite communications.

It is fundamental to be attentive to the human and affective dimension of the many personal and social experiences – of conflict and harmony with the other – that are also ingredients of ill-will and discomfort, which express the inability of society to offer acceptance and safety and also the incessant search for sharing, for discovery and for recognition, like the atmospheres of thousands of young people in hundreds of squares like, to take an example, Tahrir Square in Cairo (Coelho, 2011). Certain segments, ethnic minorities, marginal and disrespected cultures, young people that resist aseptic integration into a society sometimes lacking in humanity constitute a diverse range of grievances that push them onto the bustling streets and for short periods of time into the rebellious emancipation that drives change in society. The young and old go through these "collective experiences of conflict", about which Carlos Gadea says that "they seem to arise from the ingredient of violence, a consequence of the participants who get together in limited social circles of practical implication in the world and feel that they cannot see themselves as being governed due to a lack of 'socialisation' in the 'structure of opportunities' that were created" (Gadea, 2011: 94).

When on 19th December 2010 the young Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi set himself alight in front of a municipal office in his home town, Sidi Bouzid, in protest against the humiliation meted out by the authorities, who had confiscated his vegetables and produce which he had decided to sell, without having a permit, in his wheelbarrow, nobody could have imagined the contagious power that would be unleashed by this spark. It triggered a revolt that quickly spread to various countries and, in less than a year after this incident, had brought down a number of governments and in some cases (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya) gave rise to violent political revolutions. With levels of social inequality and significant unemployment (despite varying poverty rates), these countries are characterised by extremely young populations, the majority of them with half the population under 25 years of age and having a good level of education.

Contrary to a number of stereotypes that have taken root since 11th September 2001 relating to the "clash of civilisations" and which expose the ridicule aimed at "the Arab street" – where, according to many Western commentators, it is only possible to imagine



fundamentalist and anti-Western slogans being shouted – the young people of these countries have orchestrated the surprising downfall of dictators. “In the space of a few weeks, the myth of the passivity of the Arab people and their unsuitability for democracy had been blown sky-high (Gresh, 2011: 9). The Arab Spring deserved huge exposure in Western countries, the populations of which appeared to have been caught by surprise, and all the more so given the wave of indignation was, primarily, to bring down the tyranny and corrupt governments which had been in power for decades. In a word, they were fighting for democracy, which might signify a willingness to assimilate Western political models despite the fact that representative democracies themselves were ailing. In other words, all this seems paradoxical given that the spread of democratic values, the struggle for social justice and the Islamic countries desire for freedom took place at precisely the moment when Europe was falling headlong into a terrible economic and financial crisis, putting at risk the solidity of the democratic regimes and threatening to put an end to the *Welfare state* that had exercised so much fascination on different peoples from around the world.

The speed at which information spread and the visibility of the images of the events in real time exponentially increased the copycat effect. But the fuse only catches light when it contains sufficient gunpowder. The social causes that underlie the Arab revolutions are obviously not the same as those underlying the discontent in Western Europe. In the first case political democracy does not exist. In the second case, political democracy let itself become corrupted and was incapable of converging with economic democracy. The defence of social cohesion, which formerly was secured by the social state, is on the verge of a breakdown. We will do well not to forget that Europe is a puzzle of extremely unequal pieces which cannot be put together. In the late-developing European democracies of the southern countries (Portugal, Spain and Greece) the historical experiences of state authoritarianism left deep scars, and the brutality of the police forces and the centralisation of political power continued to prosper after the fall of the respective dictatorships.

With all of its peculiarities, the West built liberal democracies, but the excess of consumerism that neoliberal globalisation and financial capitalism spread throughout the world has had disruptive effects, such as famine, unemployment and a whole host of threats to safety and well-being. From these derived new forms of protest and activism, above all organised by the youngest and better educated, and they increasingly used new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Ever since the experience of the EZLN (the Zapatist Army in Chiapas) and the mythical commander Marcos, new and irreverent appeals to fight against hegemonic globalisation have been constantly put forward (Santos, 2005 e 2006). The protests challenging the World Trade Organisation (WTO) summit in Seattle in 1999, demonstrating against neoliberalism, enviromental destruction, and the growing hunger and misery in the world, saw hundreds of NGOs and grassroots movements concentrated in that city to show that citizenship can indeed have a voice and that participative democracy was not dead (Costa, 2006; 2010). It was the beginning of a new cycle of protests that started the so called “alter-globalisation” protest, bringing together a huge group of organisations that used computer networks and the Internet as their preferred means of contact. Cyberactivism became part of the routine of students and activists of all different types and the many initiatives of the World Social Forum promoted on various continents after the meeting in Porto Alegre (in 2003) announced a new agenda and gave a voice to trends of thought and grassroots movements in defense of participative democracy and crying out for “another world is possible!” (Santos, 2006).



Social movements can leave the stage for long periods but the previous experiences can very often act as germs that grow again from time to time, that is, memory tends to cater for an inspiring and enriching heritage in each cycle of movements. The events of December 2008 in Athens and other Greek cities (triggered after the killing of a teenager by police) served to illustrate the tensions existing in this country since the period of dictatorship and throughout the neoliberal restructuring at the beginning of the 1990s. "... in the eruption of December 2008 and during the previous ruptures, this positioning of the social in relation to its political abstraction (representation and state) was not articulated into a coherent social alternative. It was articulated as a violent, non-directional (or rather multi-directional) 'realignment' of the political with the social terrains of the dismantled previous structures, forced into being by 'the street'" (Giovanopoulos and Dalakoglou, 2011: 111). In 2009 and 2010, the student movement which was against the Bologna model of education, took some radical action in certain Spanish cities such as Valencia and Barcelona, and challenged the commodified conception of the new model of organisation for university programmes, the risk of draining funds from public universities and, in essence, the organisation of this model according to a global logic dictated by global capital interest (Santos, 2004 and 2011).

In Portuguese society, the student movement only had real political significance in the country in the now distant years of the 1960s, and had taken on particular characteristics at the beginning of this decade in Lisbon and, at the end of the same decade (after May 1968), at the University of Coimbra. "In the 1960s, in particular, the University of Coimbra became the focus for a series of intense student protests taking place under a political regime with fascist characteristics, which repressed not only students but also democratic public opinion that were demanding democracy and calling for the end of the colonial war. On the one hand, universities in Portugal were extremely elitist, but, on the other hand, they were politically active and thereby helping to extend democratic consciousness all across society" (Estanque, 2010). With the implementation of democracy in Portugal social movements were notable for the dynamism of the workers and the plurality of popular forms that came about during the Carnation Revolution (1974-75) and which led young people and students to spread the diverse ideologies of the left and the far-left, but the working class vanguard was always on the horizon. There followed a period of little youth protest, which evolved into the activism of the 1970s (Cardina, 2008) and from there to the greater individualism and indifference of the 1980s which lasted until the recent past (Estanque and Bebian, 2007). Only in the middle 1990s the university students showed again their uprising, this time related to the increasing fees in public universities, yet the first essay to assault public education in Europe (Drago, 2005).

Social movements strongly reemerged recently in the West, particularly in Europe. As previously mentioned, the Arab Spring has helped to trigger the most recent protests and sociopolitical activism. But the essential reasons are, as we indicated at the beginning, related to the labour market and the profound transformation that this has undergone in the last two decades. It can be said that the trend towards precariousness and individualisation, swept along by the neoliberal programme and the undermining of social rights, has led the younger generations to behave, firstly, in a consumerist fashion, then in an apathetic and depoliticised manner and, finally, with the increase in precariousness and unemployment, leading to fear and withdrawal. After the political and ideological convictions have been exhausted, it seemed that only individual solutions were left. The huge demonstration of the

already mentioned *Geração à Rasca* – “Desperate Generation” that took place in Lisbon and other Portuguese cities on the 12th March 2011 (named as M12M), and organised by a small group of young people through the social network, Facebook, had an unprecedented impact and took the majority of observers by surprise. Approximately 300,000 people marched through Portuguese cities, the majority in the capital. “Precariousness they want, rebels they will get!” was one of the slogans shouted the most. Despite the youthful dynamism of the protests, the demonstrators were notably diverse, from older citizens frustrated with the emancipatory promises of the revolution of April 1974, to middle-aged people made unemployed with the closures and relocations of companies, to those disposed of by the public sector, etc. The discontentment with the political parties and representative democracy were clearly visible: “A united people don't need a party!” was another slogan shouted in the Avenida da Liberdade.

In addition to employment, the need for security, the despair of families in trying to pay their debts and the risk of not only the usual sections of the less qualified but also important sections of the middle class falling overwhelmingly into poverty, we can now add – Portugal, Ireland and Greece being prominent cases – the frightening increase in austerity measures, abrupt cuts in salaries, and sharp increases in taxes and unemployment rates. The severity of the crisis and the discretionary manner in which European governments have loaded the sacrifices onto the workers and the public sector, scandalously sparing the banks, the economic elite and speculators of all types, can only lead to the increase in protests. Those camped in the *Puerta del Sol* in Madrid, and in various Spanish cities that followed in the month of May– M15M – adopted some of the features of the Portuguese movement, demanding better jobs, greater justice in the distribution of wealth and more democracy. From “Democracy Now!” to the “The indignant generation”, through to “Occupy Wall Street”, the objectives and phrases displayed before the watching media not only reflect the enormous diversity of the participants but also the actual vagueness of their objectives. In any event, the utopia, the idealism, the dream, the radicalism and the enormous variety of “demands” and ambitions, some more legitimate than others, always go hand in hand with youth movements. In this respect, the second decade of the 21st Century does not appear to differ a great deal from the 1960s. In the “Camps” of *Puerta del Sol* you can see various proposals of the indignant: «*real politics now!*»; «*they do not, they do not, they do not represent us*»; «*Spain is different, not indifferent*»; «*side a side b: we want to change the record*»; «*They are the captain, we are the sea*»; «*I love democracy, but you are absent*»; «*There is still the rest of the month left when my salary ends*»; «*violence is earning 600 Euros!*» (Velasco, 2011).

“The aims may be incoherent, but the common threads are clear. The protests that have mushroomed in over 900 cities in 80-plus countries over the past few days have voiced few practical demands, and in some cases they actually avoid making any. Participants favour the general over the specific. They think need matters more than greed. They like decisions by consensus, distrust elites and feel that capitalism’s pains and gains are unfairly shared. Beyond that, the horizon clouds.” (*The Economist*, October, 22nd 2011, p. 70). This passage sums up well the range of objectives and motivations that mobilised the millions, who on the 15th October 2011, participated in a unique global action that spread to all continents. At this point we can pinpoint the more innovative character of the present movements. Operating through social networks and reaching “dissident” social circles that are far beyond the “core groups” that in each context act as organising pivots, these are groups

which are quite fluid and volatile, that move and circulate, like links in a transmission chain of energy, enablers of socio-political dynamism. This is a language in which the meaning from contestation to radicalism of the discourse exalts “conflict” and antagonisms – “the other 1% against ‘us’, the 99%!!” – and constitutes the principal binding agent, but the aesthetics, the shades and sounds, the exotic clothes, the creative slogans, the more or less exuberant colours reveal the festive, playful and cathartic side of demonstrations where a youthful dynamic is evident, even if it does attract other age groups. As one of the young members of the indignants said in Madrid, “I am 57 years old. Today, at last, it feels like I’m 17! Onward: this is for everybody!”.

## 10. Conclusion

The present paper has shown, firstly, how the systemic process of the reorganisation of the labour market has followed a strategy of the dominant economic power and at the same time the inability of the European political elites to secure the sustainability of this model of social state whose victories are now being reversed. From the strategy of flexibilization to the huge growth in precariousness it was but a small step. Workers' rights, safety at work, recognition and professional status that bestowed dignity for decades, the sense of progress and of future that justified access to better living conditions and encouraged the indebtedness of millions of middle class families (and even manual workers), in a short period of time seem to have “vanished in thin air” without having time to slow the process or even to become aware of the real risks involved.

European citizens were quick to understand and successive international studies showed that the subjective attitudes indicated a growing concern, mistrust and discontentment with life, with the working conditions and with the functioning of institutions in general, with the emphasis being placed on the political and legal systems. The collective apprehension with the reduction in public investments and the withdrawal of or reductions in finances in public service, particularly in health and education, are some of the aspects that have given rise to greater degrees of dissatisfaction in many countries in Europe. Whether on the subjective level, or whether in relation to working conditions and access to employment, educated young people, as we have seen in this chapter, are those most affected by the changes taking place in the economies. As for Portugal, which has been under greater scrutiny here, the increase in precariousness and unemployment has been more pronounced for the young, with approximately half of these to be found in precarious situations and for whom unemployment is around 35%, which means much more than double the national average.

Signs of indifference on the part of citizens in relation to political activity and to democratic institutions have already been making themselves felt to an alarming extent since the turn of the century. But the experience of the last few years, with the constant worsening of the economic and financial crisis, particularly the deficit and the pressure of the markets, has hit the living conditions of millions of Portuguese especially hard, abruptly robbing them of their expectations and their future. This also reflected the return of the “material” values. That is to say, once again, the “post-material” values that surpassed the old “economicist” struggles in the sixties are now staying behind vis-à-vis “materialistic” goals, except that the new uprisings do not forget issues like environment, gender, human rights. The point is that now new inequalities and forms of violence come together with the increasing of new oppressions, despotic powers and exploitation inside jobs.

Of course economic crisis, the violent austerity measures, with the growing unemployment and the expansion of poverty (including in the middle class segments) contributed decisively to the new discontents. People are becoming increasingly impatient and mistrustful of national and European politicians, and over the last year, they have started to protest. On the one hand, we are witnessing large mobilisations of trade unions, organised, above all, by groups in the public sector and in the area of education, and a general strike (the second in two years), organized by the two main trade union confederations, CGTP and UGT (ordinarily rivals), by the end of November 2011. On the other hand, the initiatives of those involved in the “precarious” movements are proliferating, organised by indignant young people in the absence of opportunities to get a dignified job, and after having invested in academic careers at the universities. From having an individualist, consumerist and indifferent attitude, from the search for individual solutions that led them to reject politics, from the evolution of the old activism (of the 1970s) to recent indifference, young Portuguese people, similar to the Spanish, English, French, Greek, Americans and even those who organised the Arab Spring, are showing signs of wanting to have a voice and to return to assert a collective will. To shout out their protests and return to politics.

Some of the protagonists in the present day movements protesting against precariousness and austerity that have hit some of the peripheral countries of Europe - the the “Inflexible precarious”, the “FERVE-Fed up with green receipts”, the “Intermittents of the show”, and “May Day” -, are examples of maverick voices, of a larger dynamic irreverence, which have linked up with other groups and movements like the “Campers”, the “Indignants” and more recently “Occupy Wall Street”, “Occupy London” actions that are multiplying around the world, like the one that took place on 15th October in an admirable demonstration of vitality, of efficiency of the social networks and of cyberspace and the irreverent imagination of the present generation. Work, as the central sphere of social cohesion and integration, is the main target of this social regression unfolding in this context of crisis and austerity. But it should continue as the binding agent that can bring together distinct and traditionally divided logics of mobilisation. It is the struggle for the right to work and (through labour) for social and human rights (at work) that could bring together, on the one side, the trade unions and the precarious and, on the other side, the indignant movements that are proliferating in the country, in Europe and all around the world. Facing more urgent and primary needs, struggling against the “austeritarian” abolishing of a large set of labour rights, the aesthetic discourse loose mobilization capacity compared to those needs, but the new cultural identities of the precarious youth seems to be redefined on the grounds of both cultural and economic dimensions.

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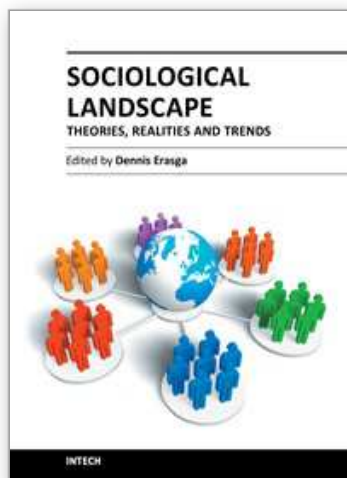


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