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Trade unionism in Brazil: organisational challenges in the face of transformations in labour relations

ABSTRACT

The aim of this essay is to discuss Brazilian trade unionism by analysing the contributions of Lúcio and Galvão from the perspective of Nancy Fraser. Lúcio ratifies the importance of a regulatory framework that restructures unions, while Galvão argues this is not enough, as the grassroots must be organised for the struggles. The Forum of Trade Union Centres (FCS) favoured the integrated action of entities to demand legal guarantees, but was unsuccessful in mobilising them. In the light of Fraser's critical conception, we understand that the struggle must be for redistribution of resources, social recognition and equal participation, which supports both the contributions of Lúcio, for whom the unions must be restructured, and those of Galvão, who advocates mobilising the grassroots so that the working class does not succumb to capital.

KEYWORDS

Labour relations
Brazilian trade unionism
Regulation mark
Grassroots mobilisation

INTRODUCTION

The recent transformations in labour relations, driven at first by the crisis of Fordism and the emergence of the flexible accumulation pattern (Harvey, 2010) and reinforced by the recent 2008 crisis (Tonelo, 2020), point to an unfavourable context for workers, while at the same time challenging the struggles of the trade union movement. The new forms of work organisation are moving towards more flexible employment relationships and the erosion of replacement of the workforce. This trend shows in the reduction of the number of workers in organisations and the imposition of polyvalent work, an increase in production through the intensification of work, an increase in working hours, and even the insertion of technologies that increase productivity at the same time they save the workforce (Alves, 2007; Antunes, 1999; Gounet, 1999; Piccinini and Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011). Along with this, there is also the use of flexible contracts that are less protected by labour legislation, such as outsourcing, self-employment or “pejotisation”¹ (Antunes, 2018).

Labour relations refers to the way in which a given society organises the purchase and sale of labour power, an acquisition that takes place on the market when the buyer and seller of this commodity face each other and establish an exchange agreement. Thus, the rules that impose conditions on the form of this acquisition – limiting working hours, stipulating minimum amounts of pay, regulating rest periods – make up these relations (De Faria, 2004; Fischer, 1987; Piccinini; Rocha-de-Oliveira, 2011). The dynamics of these relationships occur through conflicts between capital and labour, given that both have conflicting interests (De Faria, 2017). In this context, injustices whose centrality concerns inequality of redistribution are produced, such as exploitation, economic marginalisation and deprivation, as well as those that concern inequality of recognition, such as cultural domination, concealment (in which subjects become invisible through discursive practices legitimised by the culture itself), and the disrespect that emerges from stereotyped cultural representations, in which subjects are publicly disqualified or publicly defamed (Fraser, 2006).

It is worth mentioning that, along with the crisis of Fordism, the main capitalist countries experienced a crisis of the so-called welfare state and the implementation of neoliberalism. Far from being just a set of public policies that cut social spending and take away rights, neoliberalism is a political project of the global capitalist class that aims to suffocate the workers’ movement, especially the trade union movement (Harvey, 2008). In addition, the collapse of the Soviet experiment in the early 1990s contributed to a crisis of the socialist imaginary and the strengthening of a new political imaginary based on the fight against the injustices of cultural domination and the deficit of recognition (Fraser, 2006).

In light of the rise of neoliberalism, with attacks on the legal protections of the working class, a discussion is under way in various spheres of the country about the direction of trade

unionism. In this debate, in the academic sphere, Lúcio (2021) proposes a restructuring of trade unions in order to renew trade union organisation in the face of the new labour context. For Galvão (2021), it’s not enough just to restructure trade union activity; it is also necessary to organise workers to face “the ideological impact of neoliberalism”. In this sense, Galvão (2021) advocates a less normative and more political direction, which is to say that far beyond the constitution of a legal framework, trade unions must direct their struggles more broadly, in the sense of revealing the contradictions between capital and labour and mobilising their grassroots.

Thus, this essay aims to contribute to the debate on Brazilian trade unionism by analysing the contributions made by Lúcio and Galvão from the perspective of Nancy Fraser’s critical theory.

The next section presents a brief history of Brazilian trade unionism and describes the organisation of the Brazilian trade union movement. The section after that addresses Lúcio and Galvão’s proposals, as well as the theoretical proposition of this study, based on Fraser’s. The final considerations summarise the proposals for Brazilian trade unionism.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BRAZILIAN TRADE UNIONS AND HOW THEY ARE ORGANISED

In Brazil, trade unionism has experienced various moments since the creation of the CLT (Consolidated Labour Laws) by President Getúlio Vargas on 1 May, 1943, when the country was changing its profile from a rural economy to one in a process of industrialisation. During this period, unions were tied to state control, in a corporatist and authoritarian way (Campos, 2016). Surveillance relationships were established with co-opted union leaders (known by the jargon *pelegos*²) and through the so-called union tax, which involved government control over union funding (Antunes, 2018).

When the military took power in 1964, unions were suppressed, along with other segments of society. Despite the truculence of the military regime, the struggle for democracy broke out in the late 1970s and unions played an important role in this process. Thus the “new trade unionism” emerged, marked by large-scale strikes and the political articulations that developed in that decade. In 1978, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Lula) emerged as a leading figure as president of the São Bernardo and Diadema Metalworkers’ Union (now the ABC), in the historic strike by assembly plant workers (Colombi et al., 2022).

Antunes and Silva (2015, p. 511) note that “the new unionism promoted significant changes in Brazilian union and political culture by establishing new practices, mechanisms and institutions” which were confrontational, trying to distance themselves from state control and its agreements. The 1980s and 1990s were a period of effervescence in social, trade union and political movements, in which the transition from military to civilian rule led to the emergence of new political parties, including the Workers’ Party (PT), which Lula helped

¹ Translator’s note: A loan translation from Brazilian Portuguese, denoting the practice of a worker starting a company and being hired as a legal entity – a PJ (Pessoa Jurídica, juridical person) – instead of an individual worker, and thus giving up basic labour rights.

² Translator’s note. A pelego is a piece of harness used in the south of Brazil and Argentina, made of sheep or lamb leather and placed on the saddle to allow the rider to ride more comfortably. The term became a metaphor referring for a union leader at the service of the powerful, or even considered a traitor to the workers.

found and in which he has been leading his political life.

In 2002, Lula was elected president of Brazil by the Workers' Party (PT) for two terms, and managed to make Dilma Rousseff, also of the PT, his successor, also for two terms (though she ruled for one and a half terms due to an impeachment process). The period from 2003 to 2016 was marked by a left-wing government, but one that had to negotiate support with other ideological camps in order to run the country. In the meantime, the unions embodied negotiating practices with which they agreed on actions, measures and policies, renouncing confrontation (Antunes and Silva, 2015). According to Colombi (2019), the negotiating stance and the union leaders' attachment to a political-ideological stance in line with the government's played an important role during this period. We understand that this practice, to a certain extent, contributed to the demobilisation and weakening of the working class' power to fight, although other factors also play a role in this context.

In addition, from 2013 to 2016, the country went through a wave of street movements, which was a watershed for the Brazilian trade union movement, because until then the movement had been successful in a number of strikes and favourable negotiations, but it was already having difficulty in mobilising the grassroots for union struggles (Lúcio, 2021). Proof of this were the "days of 2013", whose interpretations are controversial among researchers, but undoubtedly protests on those days brought large numbers of people onto the streets.

Initially, the demonstrations, over public transport fares, were progressive in nature. However, part of the mobilisation was captured and led by rightists, with diffuse, conservative agendas and attacking Dilma's government, which culminated in a coup against the president in 2016. The movements, which claimed to be "No Party", brought the extreme right to the streets, with a discourse that rejected any parties or entities, as if political neutrality were possible (Ferraz, Gomes and Souza, 2017). To a certain extent, by disseminating the idea that parties, organisations and movements were responsible for the ills of society and therefore dispensable, the working class ended up feeling a certain hopelessness in the collective struggle, contributing to a negative view of party politics and unions, and this became part of the discursive strategy of the far right.

Thus, in 2016, through a process in the federal legislature (which had a majority of centre, right and far right parties), the political coup against President Dilma took place, for the "crime of fiscal pedalling"³ (Colombi, 2019), ending only recently on 21 August, 2023, when the Federal Regional Court (TRF) of the 1st Region (Brasília) unanimously dismissed the improbity action, clearing Dilma (Richter, 2023). The president was removed from office at a time that was unfavourable to progressive demands. As a result of the demobilisation of the population and the fragility of the unions (Campos, 2016), popular resistance cooled in the period between 2016 and 2022.

The weakening of the progressive camp created a favourable scenario for the implementation of unpopular policies that took away workers' social rights. The 2017 labour reform, which produced profound changes to the Consolidation of Labour Laws (Marcelino and Galvão, 2020), is particularly noticeable. Regarding union representation, the new legislation allows agreements and negotiations between employers and employees to prevail, legally, over what is legislated. By assuming equal conditions between workers and capitalists, this provision creates legal uncertainty for the former, who, in a context of structural unemployment, may find themselves obliged to accept agreements that do not benefit them at all. The Brazilian union model includes federations, confederations and union centres in addition to unions of specific sectors and professions.

Although they emerged decades earlier (DIEESE, 2023), it was only in 2008 that Law No. 11 648 was passed; it officially recognised trade union centres (Marcelino and Galvão, 2020), allocating a percentage of the Union Tax (union contribution), extinguished in 2017, to those centres that reached the level of representativeness provided for in the legislation (DIEESE, 2023). In 2019, in the context of weakening unions on the one hand and the need to confront the Bolsonaro government's attacks on the other, the FCS was created, which is an "informal coalition created to present politically unified positions in a scenario of growing adversity for workers" (Colombi et al., 2022, p. 23).

Since the first government of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, a president with a history related to the "new trade unionism", there had been discussions about possible trade union reform. In 2010, the Labour Relations Council (CRT) was created. However, with the fall of the left-wing government in 2016, the discussion running at the CRT was put on hold.

To resume the debate on the situation of working-class organisations, the FCS organised the National Conference of the Working Class (CONCLAT), which took place in April 2022 (Marcelino and Galvão, 2020) with the themes employment, rights, democracy and life. The FCS approved the decision to repeal what it called the "regressive milestones of the labour reform", as suggested by the program of the then Lula/Alckmin ticket.

Upon taking office again in 2023, the newly elected government created a Tripartite Working Group of government, trade union centres and entrepreneurs, tasked with debating a new regulatory framework for labour relations in Brazil. This discussion is expected to generate a bill which may be sent to the national congress for approval (Lúcio, 2020, 2021; Mirhan and Santana, 2023).

Table 1 shows a list of Brazilian trade union centres, their year of foundation, and the representation rates of each, from data registered with the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MTE) and accessible to these entities.

³ Translator's note: A loan translation from Brazilian Portuguese, meaning misusing or manipulating public accounts to hide budget gaps.

TABLE 1: BRAZILIAN TRADE UNION CENTRES

TRADE UNION CENTRE	YEAR OF FOUNDATION	RATE OF REPRESENTATION (%)
Central Unificada Dos Profissionais Servidores Públicos Do Brasil (Unified Centre for Professional Public Servants in Brazil)	1958 (Inactive at MTE)	0.01
Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUT) (Unified Workers' Centre)	1983	27.45
Força Sindical (FS) (Trade Union Force)	1990	18.45
Intersindical Da Orla Portuária Do Espírito Santo (Interunion of the Port Area of Espírito Santo)	1991	0.01
Associação Nacional Dos Sindicatos Social-Democrata (National Association of Social Democratic Trade Unions)	1997	0.01
Central Geral dos Trabalhadores do Brasil (CGTB) (General Centre of Workers of Brazil)	2004	1.60
Nova Central Sindical dos Trabalhadores (NCST) (New Workers' Trade Union Centre)	2005	13.44
União Sindical dos Trabalhadores (UST) (Workers' Trade Union)	2006	0.04
União Geral dos Trabalhadores (UGT) (General Workers' Union)	2007	14.08
Central dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras do Brasil (CTB) (Centre of Men and Women Workers of Brazil)	2007	10.39
Central dos Sindicatos Brasileiros (CSB) (Brazilian Unions Centre)	2008	10.56
Central Dos Trabalhadores e Trabalhadoras Do Brasil - RS (Centre of Men and Women Workers of Brazil in Rio Grande do Sul)	2008	0.01
Central Nacional Sindical Dos Profissionais Em Geral - CENASP (National Trade Union Centre for Professionals in General)	2009	0.01
Central Sindical e Popular - Coordenação Nacional de Lutas (CSP-Conlutas) (People's Trade Union Centre - National Coordination of Struggles)	2010	0.96
Intersindical - Central da Classe Trabalhadora (Interunion - Working Class Centre)	2014	0.12
Pública - Central do Servidor (Public Servant Centre)	2015	1.34
Central das Entidades de Servidores Públicos (CESP) (Central of Public Servant Entities)	2017	0.53
Central do Brasil Democrática de Trabalhadores - (CBDT Nacional) (Central Democratic Workers' Union of Brazil)	2023	0.93
TOTAL		100%

Source: Prepared by the authors using data from the MTE (2024).

At the end of the first decade of the 2000s and the beginning of the second, several trade union centres were created, fragmenting working-class representation. This phenomenon may be related to the emergence of public funding for trade union centres, if we consider that some political groups preferred to create their own centre rather than compete for political space and resources with already consolidated leaderships.

Colombi et al. (2022) pointed out that there were thirteen trade union centres, according to the register of these bodies deposited with the Ministry of Economy in December 2021. However, this register is currently being updated by the MTE and so far has 18 registered trade union centres.

The FCS was created with the aim of reducing fragmentation and strengthening the trade union struggle. It is made up of CUT, FS, UGT, CTB, NCST, CSB, Intersindical, CSP Conlutas, CGTB and Pública (Colombi et al., 2022). With Lula’s return to the federal executive, the FCS was invited to join the Tripartite Working Group to discuss a new trade union legal framework. The discussion around a new regulatory framework for labour relations requires confronting the characteristics of the Brazilian union structure, which includes divisions according to geographical delimitations and also professional categories as established by the government in accordance with the Framework of Activities and Related Professions, in which the unions have “the municipality as their minimum territorial base” (DIEESE, 2023, p. 86).

PROPOSALS FOR BRAZILIAN TRADE UNIONISM

Contemporary union struggles take place in a complex scenario, but with potential for progress, despite some proposals that have been discussed in the literature. Below we will analyse Lúcio’s (2020, 2022) proposals and Galvão’s (2021) debate with him. This analysis will be based on Fraser’s (2009) three dimensions of justice: recognition, redistribution and equal participation.

Fraser (2006) argues that recognition became the paradigm of political conflicts at the end of the 20th century. In this scenario, the demands for recognition of difference (of nationality, ethnicity, “race”, gender and sexuality) supersede class interests, in which cultural recognition takes the place of socio-economic redistribution even though the struggles for recognition take place in a world with marked material inequality. This is why Fraser (2006) points to the need for a new intellectual and practical task, namely to develop a critical theory of recognition combined with the social policy of equality, theorising how economic deprivation and cultural disrespect are intertwined and sustain each other simultaneously.

Moreover, Nancy Fraser has incorporated criticisms of her initial formulation, pointing to the integration of the cultural and economic dimensions with a third, the political dimension, in an arrangement that allows for the participation of all social actors. By adding the third dimension – the political (equal participation) – the author updates her theory for the 21st century, to advocate equal representation whose character is democratic but different from the liberal-bourgeois state’s concept of representative democracy. In other words, Fraser (2009) advocates representation in which all social actors can have direct access to the decision-making process.

LÚCIO’S PROPOSAL

Lúcio (2020; 2021) states that, until 2017, there was no crisis in Brazilian trade unionism, but there were dilemmas, political attacks and a contradiction between trade union freedom and restrictions on trade union autonomy with the strengthening of some trade union centres and the weakening of grassroots unions.

Lúcio’s proposal brings together the FCS’s discussions, which have been taking place since 2019, with proposed guarantees for the working class. We present the dimensions of Lúcio’s proposal in Table 2.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF THE DIMENSIONS OF LÚCIO’S PROPOSAL

DIMENSION	ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL
Foundations	Foundations
Trade union organisation	Representation, collective negotiations, regulation, public servants
Role of the state	Role of the state
Transitional constitutional provisions	Transitional constitutional provisions
The future: towards an inter-union pact for change	a) The young worker of the future b) The movement c) Representation for all d) The aggregation e) The workplace f) The place of residence g) Unions and social protection h) The hidden employer i) Employability j) Unions and services k) Financing and asset reorganisation l) Communication m) Research, education and advisory services
An expanded and renewed trade union agenda	• Job protection policies and the state as “employer of last resort”. • Reducing working hours and increasing hourly wages. • Impacts of technology in the world of work – technology as a collective good to improve working and living conditions for all, and not as an instrument of exclusion or increased inequality. • Education and professional training (technological change, freedom, democracy and equality). • Labour productivity and ways of sharing gains. • Flexibility in hiring and expanded labour protection.

Source: Authors’ data (2024), based on excerpts from Lúcio’s text (2021)

Lúcio (2021) believes that the new Brazilian labour legislation, with the flexibilisation of labour relations and the consequent weakening of unions, would be something given, as shown in other countries, by the stage the capitalist mode of production finds itself in.

Thus Lúcio argues that the future of Brazilian trade unionism requires “a bold project to transition from the current trade union structure to a new approach” (Lúcio, 2021, p. 18), noting that the content he addresses has already been appreciated by academia through various approaches “which have stimulated evaluations of the need for and feasibility of a *restructuring planned and coordinated by union leaders*” (2021, p. 4; emphasis added). This proposition overestimates the role of union leaders in this task.

The author talks about returning to “root unionism”, but doesn’t specify what root unionism consists of. He also mentions that “‘solidarity’, ‘identity’ and ‘representation’ have lost their old meaning and need to be reframed” (Lúcio, 2021, p. 4) without explaining what this old meaning consists of. Given the Brazilian context, in which not all trade union centres have joined the FCS, and the centres that do participate have different theoretical and political actions and nuances (Colombi, 2019; Mirhan and Santana, 2023), it is necessary to explain the meanings of the terms mentioned by Lúcio. This proposal is an alternative to address structural and legal issues, but it lacks elements to deal with grassroots mobilisation and the political struggle against capital.

GALVÃO’S PROPOSAL

Galvão (2021) invites Lúcio (2021) to debate the challenges and future possibilities for Brazilian trade unionism and. Table 3 shows Galvão’s contributions.

TABLE 3 - GALVÃO’S ANALYSIS OF THE DIMENSIONS OF LÚCIO’S PROPOSAL

DIMENSION	ELEMENTS OF THE PROPOSAL
<u>Legal-political dimension</u> (Equal representation in decision-making)	“If everything is decided from above - by the state, via trade union legislation, and/or by the leaders, who define the best form of organisation based on the institutional guarantees that assure them, without necessarily worrying about the best way to do effective grassroots work - how are workers going to recognise themselves and give legitimacy to the organisations designed to represent their interests?” (Galvão, 2021, p. 7)
<u>Sociocultural dimension</u> (Social recognition of subjects)	“To broaden the social base of trade unionism, incorporating the precarious, women, young people, blacks, immigrants; to incorporate new demands, such as the issue of social reproduction (given the recognition of the importance of domestic and care work) and concern for the environment; to combat inequalities and discrimination associated with gender, race, sexual orientation ... by organising and mobilising workers in the territories in which they circulate and live” (Galvão 2021, p. 3).
<u>Economic dimension</u> (Redistribution)	“[...] the construction and propagation of a broad agenda around the importance of work in society, which includes the defence of socially useful jobs, the reduction of working hours without wage cuts and policies for income distribution and social protection” (Galvão, 2021, p. 7)

Source: Authors’ data compiled from excerpts from Galvão’s text (2021).

In questioning the progress on a new legal framework for Brazilian trade unionism, given that discussions are taking place at the top (the state, union leaders and businesspeople) far removed from grassroots participation, Galvão (2021) reveals the somehow hierarchical nature of Lúcio’s (2021) proposal, a pertinent issue in relation to union leaders.

Furthermore, Galvão (2021) highlights the prescriptive nature of Lúcio’s proposal, as if the systematisation of new precepts alone had the power to breathe new life into unions. The author brings to light the core of any discussion about trade unionism for the 21st century: that organisations must promote the participation of the working class not as spectators, but as protagonists.

Galvão’s (2021) proposal also incorporates the idea that it is crucial to expand the territory in which trade unions operate, creating the possibility of mobilising workers in the most diverse spaces in which they circulate. This proposal is important given that, in the contemporary scenario, work can be carried out in different territories, at the company’s premises or in public spaces, and at people’s homes in the case of teleworking. Galvão (2021) is clear about how complex it would be to implement the proposal defended in his text, but he sees the need to take into account the new work scenario in which everyone is recognised in their diversity (gender, race, sexual orientation, culture, age, class, and so on), going beyond structural and legal aspects.

Galvão (2021) also argues that trade unions must build an agenda that includes possibilities for a fairer distribution of economic resources, with a perspective that can help to overcome the relationship of submission of the workforce to capital.

Galvão (2021) also points out the importance of the trade union movement recognising the subjectivity of workers as a constitutive element of human beings. Given that the discursive practices that promote the neoliberal ideology propagate individualism as a life option, they affect the subjectivity of individuals and hinder collective experiences of otherness.

Finally, despite the existence of the FCS since 2019, there is still fragmentation, which undermines the possibility of building common alternatives because, although “in the current context of regression of rights, divergences tend to take a back seat, there are still important differences to be considered when analysing the prospects for the Brazilian trade union movement” (Galvão, 2021, p. 3).

FOR A CRITICAL PROPOSAL

In light of a contemporary critical theory developed by the American Nancy Fraser (2006, 2009, 2024) – the result of theoretical clashes with so-called Marxian authors from the third generation of the Frankfurt School – we sought to analyse the contributions of Lúcio and Galvão to the current moment of Brazilian trade unionism, based on the following dimensions:

1. Equal distribution of material wealth, which corresponds to the economic dimension for Fraser;
2. Social recognition, which corresponds to the cultural dimension for Fraser;
3. Equal representation in decision-making spheres, which corresponds to the legal-political dimension for Fraser.

Galvão's (2021) proposal is broader and follows Fraser's theoretical formulations, as he argues that, far beyond new union regulations, we must seek to include grassroots political representation as protagonists in and of all spaces and at all times of the struggle, from conception to practice.

Regarding cultural recognition, Fraser (2006, 2009) advocates for cultural justice that is integrated with other popular struggles, which a trade union must promote, in order to transform the cultural and symbolic structures of the capitalist system. Thus, true recognition is not about identity but status, and involves "a more comprehensive transformation of social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication, so as to transform *everyone's* sense of self" (Fraser, 2006, p. 232). For Fraser (2006, 2009, 2024), there is distributive injustice when people are prevented from participating fully in society because of economic structures that prevent them from accessing the resources they need to live on equal terms. Only by combining a robust egalitarian distribution policy with an inclusive and class-sensitive recognition policy can we build a fairer world. In this way, the right to recognition is the right to share socially constructed goods and socially produced income (De Faria, 2017), not via income distribution, but as goods and public policies – that is, if the subject is recognised, they have access to decisions and to everything that is socially produced, and this changes the *status* of the actors.

Still on the political-legal dimension, Galvão (2021, p. 4) believes that all subjects must be able to participate directly in socio-cultural, economic and political life, pointing out that, in the current system of capital, "the unstructured nature of our labour market means that many workers, because they are protected neither by legislation nor by the collective bargaining carried out by unions, do not see themselves as agents with rights", because, despite being part of society, they are excluded from it. Lúcio (2021), on the other hand, believes that political participation can be representative, such as the discussion on the new union legal framework which is taking place through union leaders without the grassroots being aware of it.

Thus it can be said that Fraser's critical theory is close to Galvão's proposition (2021), insofar as the authors argue that recognition of the working class occurs through direct political (not only representative) action and the fair distribution of produced goods and public policies, with the basic task of trade unions being to mobilise and organise subjects, included or excluded from the formal labour market, to fight for the right to a dignified existence.

The reality described only reaffirms the urgency of thinking about practices that actually mobilise the grassroots, since union restructuring alone will not make people defend their rights and participate in popular struggles. Thus the FCS ratified a march to Brasília in the first half of 2024, to pressure the congress and the federal government to repeal measures contrary to the interests of workers, in May. This proposal could have been a part of the integrated union action in the interests of the working class, but the grassroots were not mobilised or made aware of this plan, so it was a summit action.

Thus, in the light of Fraser's critical conceptions, it is essential that trade unions include their members in all stages of the movement, constituting *de facto* equal participation. It is also

essential that the subjects are recognised as human beings, whether they are formal workers, precarious workers, unemployed workers, women, young people, black people or immigrants. In addition, we must fight for a fair redistribution of the resources produced by the labour force. Added to this is the need to consider the psychosocial aspect as a manifestation of individual and collective subjectivity, rescuing the otherness and sense of belonging of the working class.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Considering the scenario outlined above, it is difficult to offer a single answer regarding a new legal framework for Brazilian trade unionism and for broadening the scope of the trade union struggle to one in which the working class can make concrete contributions to strengthening trade union entities.

We believe that the proposals discussed for a new trade unionism are complementary. Thus the project for a new union structure (Lúcio, 2021) makes important contributions, given the new types of employment contract introduced by the Brazilian labour reform, new technologies and informality promoted by digital platforms, domestic work and unemployment, among others. Galvão (2021), on the other hand, goes beyond the normative aspect, as he advocates a unionism that "expands the spaces of action beyond the workplace, organising and mobilising workers in the territories in which they circulate and live" (Galvão, 2021, p. 3).

Thus the FCS is a concrete response to the integrated action of the entities, through joint actions and participation in the Tripartite Working Group that is discussing the new regulatory framework, as advocated by Lúcio (2021). However, this alone is not enough, as Brazilian trade unionism has not yet achieved recent success in mobilising the grassroots, according to Galvão (2021), to reflect on and fight for decent work, income redistribution, socio-cultural recognition, equal political participation and practices of solidarity and belonging that promote social justice (Fraser, 2009).

This article was limited to examining the performance of national trade union organisations in general. There is a need to deepen the study with more robust data and empirical data collection, which could be broken down by sector of activity, territory (municipality, state or country) and union structure (grassroots, federation or central). Another broader empirical study could involve a comparison with the international trade union movement ■

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