INDUSTRIALIZATION, ORGANIZATION AND UNIONIZATION IN SÃO PAULO

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Sociology of work has been a popular topic for Brazilian social scientists, and is a major trend in the southern part of the country, especially in the industrialized state of São Paulo. The effects of this interest are beginning to accumulate, as may be observed through the books reviewed here. However, this type of work needs to be extended to other areas of the country in order to evaluate more realistically the impact of the introduction of new technologies upon the social organization of work. Although using diverse methodologies, the three books focus on the relationship between industrial development, organization and worker ideologies. They all describe phenomena in support of the theory that the greater the industrialization, the greater the bureaucratization of workers’ unions and the less the class consciousness and participation of the workers. They present a dynamic determinism, suggesting an image of the formation of the Brazilian working class quite different from its European counterpart. That is an important step, for it moves away from that simplistic vision according to which
the Brazilian working class is developing along the same evolutionary lines as European capitalism.

Azis Simão proposes to show the changing relationships between trade unions and the state, with union activities passing from an initial phase of militancy to a subsequent phase of bureaucracy. This transition from one type of unionism to another is seen as a consequence of industrialization. The state mechanism is presented as an agent accentuating the tendencies toward bureaucratization, especially regarding the centralization of decision making.

In order to demonstrate his thesis, Simão divides the book into four parts. The first deals with the emergence of the industrial worker coming from the rural areas of Brazil. The author also considers the stages of industrialization which occurred in the country. In the second part he describes the condition of labor from the rural epoch to the last period of industrialization under study. In the third part he deals with changes within the types and the extent of collective labor conflicts. He also mentions the variations in attitude by both the dominant class and the government in the face of these conflicts. In the fourth part he deals with the organizational forms of the labor movement according to each period of industrialization.

To prove that these changes occurred, Simão uses documentary sources: three major newspapers, working-class bulletins and newspapers, annals of assemblies and other official publications. He also used data obtained from informal interviews with old participants of the labor movement, which helped to clarify some facts not explained by the documents.

The book offers a contribution to the history of unionism by the wealth of its details on the period before Getulio Vargas. It is, however, exclusively restricted to the state of São Paulo. The consequences of this focus are: an excessive technological determinism which proves inadequate to answer some of the problems raised by the author; and an excessive political determinism when considering the efficacy of the legal mechanisms on the changing relationships of labor. Azis Simão raises the problem of the formation of a corporative union organization, inquiring into the motives which gave rise to it, and opposing it to the liberal type of participation which he calls "anarchist activity in the tropical manner." However, the countries which furnished the largest contingent of migrants to the industry of São Paulo were exactly those which suffered from the same change from anarchism to corporatism.