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RESEARCH ARTICLE

TRIGGERING SOLIDARITY ACTIONS TOWARDS CONTINGENT WORKERS AND THE UNEMPLOYED

The point of view of grassroots trade unionists and labour activists

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ABSTRACT: Since the 1980s, trade unions have suffered a decrease in membership, public legitimacy and the capacity to achieve their core objectives. Renewal strategies have varied, depending on the national context. Part of them focused on rank-and-file mobilization and social movement unionism. In the Greek context, the academic discussion about the crisis of trade unions took place mainly during the 2000s, but without having an impact within union circles or on union strategies. Additionally, grassroots and rank-and-file unions that adopted a social movement and radical unionism approach, and contested the 'institutionalized official' trade unions, remained marginal and their actions were not very visible. The recent fiscal crisis and the implementation of the Memoranda brought up previous dysfunctions. In a context of increasing employment precarity and unemployment, the general position of official trade unions towards contingent workers and the unemployed has been strongly contested, while grassroots rank-and-file unions claim a more active role in this area. Given the above considerations, this article focuses on the strategies of trade unions towards contingent workers and the unemployed, in the Greek context. Results derive from interviews with Greek grassroots trade unionists and labour activists in the framework of the TransSOL (Transnational Solidarity at Times of Crisis) EU-funded program.

KEYWORDS: Contingent workers, grassroots unions, solidarity, trade unions, unemployed

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1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, it has been generally accepted that trade unions are on the defensive; suffering a decrease in membership, public legitimacy and the capacity to achieve their core objectives. Even if, at first, many trade unionists denied the idea of the crisis of unions, they gradually questioned the effectiveness of union inclusiveness and traditional union strategies and accepted the fact that unions could remain significant social actors only if they renewed themselves (Hyman 1999, 2007). Renewal strategies have varied, depending on the national context. According to Turner and Hurd (2001, 10),

The most significant of these are organizing of the unorganized, grassroots political action, coalition building, labor-management partnership, union mergers and internal restructuring, and international solidarity. Most of the new strategies are connected, directly or indirectly, to a new emphasis on rank-and-file participation or mobilization, the essence of social movement unionism.

Social Movement Unionism (SMU) is defined in contradiction to traditional and more institutionalized and bureaucratic forms of trade unionism. Moody in his book *Workers in a Lean World* (1997, 4-5) defines social movement unionism (SMU) as follows:

Social movement unionism is one that is deeply democratic, as that is the best way to mobilize the strength of numbers in order to apply maximum economic leverage. It is militant in collective bargaining in the belief that retreat anywhere only leads to more retreats – an injury to one is an injury to all. It seeks to craft bargaining demands that create more jobs and aid the whole class. It fights for power and organization in the workplace or on the job in the realization that it is there that the greatest leverage exists, when properly applied. It is political by acting independently of the retreating parties of liberalism and social democracy, whatever the relations of the union with such parties. It multiplies its political and social power by reaching out to other sectors of the class, be they other unions, neighbourhood organizations, or other social movements. It fights for all the oppressed and enhances its own power by doing so¹.

¹ Moody's definition highlights the political dimension and the class-centred action of SMU, contrary to other definitions. As it is pointed out by Upchurch and Mathers (2011, 3) SMU "...has all too often been presented in a fashion suggesting that it is a universal panacea for union decline and proposed in such a way as to assume a 'best way' approach to union revival" while there has been a tendency towards valoriz-

Based on the above definition, as well as on definitions from other works by Moody, union democracy plays a crucial role; organising the unorganised should be a priority; union struggles about economic issues can lead to greater political struggles; unions should ally with community organisations, as well as with rank-and-file workers and other trade unions (Schiavone 2007).

In the Greek context, the academic discussion on the crisis of trade unions took place mainly during the 2000s, but without having an impact within union circles or on union strategies. Additionally, grassroots and rank-and-file unions that adopted a social movement and radical unionism approach, and contested the 'institutionalized official' trade unions remained marginal and their actions were not very visible (Mattonni and Vogiatzoglou 2014).

The recent fiscal crisis and the implementation of the Memoranda² have produced new challenges for Greek trade unions and brought up previous dysfunctions that exacerbated the crisis in representation and the lack of confidence towards institutional unions (Kapsalis 2012; Kouzis 2014; Vogiatzoglou 2014). Moreover, the ability of Greek trade unions to trigger solidarity actions, at the national and supra-national level, which go beyond their traditional means of action, or concern the usual 'target populations' of their actions, has also been questioned. Nevertheless, despite the emerging signs of self-criticism and the relevant discussion inside official trade union structures, no radical changes have taken place. In a context of increasing employment precarity and unemployment, the general position of official trade unions towards contingent workers and the unemployed has been strongly contested, while grassroots rank-and-file unions claim a more active role in this area.

Given the above considerations, on this article, we will focus on the strategies of trade unions towards contingent workers and the unemployed, as highlighted by the relevant literature, as well as within the Greek context. Additionally, we will examine

ing spontaneity and voluntarism which, while usefully focusing on the self-mobilizing capacity of the rank-and-file, tends to omit questions of unions' political identity and the relationship of unions to the state." Thus, the authors point out the de-politicized presentation of SMU, marked by a certain denial or downgrading of class as a transformation agent, and propose the concept of radical political unionism, as an alternative (RPU). While RPU includes the characteristics of SMU, union actions are politically focused and class-centred (Upchurch and Mathers 2011).

² By Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) (or Economic Adjustment Programs) we refer to the programs of financial assistance accorded to Greece in order to cope with the Greek debt crisis. The first MoU has been signed in 2010 between the Greek government and the so-called Troika [the European Commission (the Eurogroup), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)]. Two more MoUs have been signed subsequently in 2012 and 2015.

the challenges related to union action (at the national and the international level) with regard to contingent employment and unemployment. The focus on these dimensions stems from the issues examined in the framework of the TransSOL program³. Results derive from interviews with Greek grassroots trade unionists and labour activists.

The article is structured as follows. The first section offers a review of the literature, regarding trade union strategies towards contingent workers and the unemployed. In the second section, we concentrate on Greek trade unionism. On the one hand, we examine the role of the 'official' and more 'institutionalized' trade unions, before and since the beginning of the fiscal crisis. On the other hand, we focus on the role of grassroots and rank-and-file unions adopting a social movement and radical unionism approach. In the third section, we present data from the TransSOL program about the perceptions of Greek grassroots trade unionists and labour activists on the subject of solidarity. Finally, in the conclusion, the results of the research in question are discussed.

2. Trade unions strategies towards contingent workers and the unemployed: a literature review

The academic discussion on trade unionism considers the rise of unemployment and contingent forms of employment as a major challenge for union action, given that contingent workers and the unemployed are not typical groups represented by unions. Historically, full-time workers in long-term work arrangements have been the ones forming the basis of trade unions and defining their objectives, which were largely based on the needs and characteristics of these groups of workers (Hyman 1999). Frequently, trade unions have been accused of mainly representing permanent workers ('insiders') and not those in precarious employment conditions ('outsiders'). A few decades ago, trade unions considered the – at that time – rather novel and uncommon forms of contingent employment as unacceptable and claimed their abolition, without showing much concern towards contingent workers (Keune 2013). This seemed in a

³ Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the project "European paths to transnational solidarity at times of crisis: Conditions, forms, role models and policy responses" (TransSOL). This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 649435. TransSOL is a transnational research project dedicated to providing systematic and practice-related knowledge about European solidarity at times of crisis. The project started in June 2015 and will run until May 2018. More information can be found at: <http://transsol.eu/>

certain way 'logical' since the 'lion's share of their membership' comprised mainly 'insiders' (Keune 2013, 66). The main strategy that has been followed, with regard to contingent workers, is that of exclusion (Durrazzi 2017), in an effort to protect workers from insecure employment, as well as existing members from competition within the labour market (Heery 2009).

Nevertheless, the increase of these forms of employment changed the position of trade unions considerably. Unions could no longer overlook their declining membership among 'insiders' and the increasing number of 'outsiders' representing a potential source of membership (Keune 2013). Thus, 'organising the unorganised' (Heery 2005) became a major objective. Contrary to their traditional opposition towards atypical employment, resulting to the avoidance or exclusion of precarious workers, most unions have recognized the fact that 'precarity is a reality that will not go away' (Gumbrell-McCormick 2011, 297) and understood that the non-inclusion of contingent workers in their membership would weaken the trade unions' capacity to act (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2017).

Nowadays, unions show variable degrees of inclusiveness (Durrazzi 2017; Kahancová and Martišková 2011). However, the most crucial decision that unions must make is whether they are willing to represent precarious workers (Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014; Gumbrell-McCormick 2011). According to Heery (2009, 430), trade unions strategies

range from exclusion through acceptance, but in a subordinate position, acceptance on the basis of equal treatment with workers in permanent employment and 'engagement', characterized by union attempts to represent the specific and differentiated needs of contingent workers. The latter might be conceived of as 'representing diversity', a union equivalent to diversity management.

Inclusive strategies, aiming to integrate contingent workers into union structures, focus on equal treatment (Heery 2009) and unions serve as broad interest representation organisations, not distinguishing between contingent and permanent workers (Keune 2013). Inclusive strategies are not homogenous. In some cases, unions treat precarious workers as a particular focus-group, demanding distinct consideration. Here, unions postulate for differentiated membership status and participation structures, and concentrate on agreements and policies that recognize the distinctive needs of these workers (Heery 2009; Keune 2013). Unions can also deal with precarious work through collective agreements, legislative means, industrial action or social dialogue procedures in order to improve legislation, regarding precarious workers; mobilization and organisation of precarious workers within trade unions organisations and sensibili-

zation campaigns (Keune 2013; Boonstra, Keune and Verhulp 2012). In the case of exclusion, unions represent the 'insiders' interest and exclude contingent workers. Even though exclusion is not the most common union response, it can be considered as being 'logical' under certain circumstances. For instance, according to Simms (2010, 24),

Unions with an identity of a 'guild' or 'professional association' may well rely on excluding particular occupational groups from the labour market and/or from membership, especially where they regard these workers are undermining the labour market regulation that has already been established.

The adopted strategies are conditioned by the unions' ideology and identity, the organisational and ideological incentives of unions to represent contingent workers, as well as by their organisational structure and the institutional context within which they operate (Gumbrell-McCormick 2011; Durrazzi 2017; Kretsos 2011a). According to Bernassi and Vlandas (2016, 10) "unions must be understood not only as 'rational' actors with fixed interests but as actors with distinctive logics of action, or ideological orientations, which derive from their embeddedness in the national context". Therefore, the identity of trade unions influences the interests with which they identify, the agenda they follow, as well as the power resources they encourage and put in place (Durrazzi 2017). For example, class-oriented trade unions⁴ will probably adopt more inclusive strategies towards contingent workers, as they are interested in the wellbeing of *all* workers (Durrazzi 2017).

Nevertheless, in practice, 'organising the unorganised' has been proven to be a perplexing task, marked both by successes and failures. In some cases, even if the official union discourse included the representation of 'outsiders', insufficient resources have been devoted to organising activities (Keune 2013). In other cases, unions have had the tendency to approach organising as "a 'toolbox' of practices rather than as having an underpinning political philosophy or objective" (Simms and Holgate 2010, 157). Focusing on membership growth, the politics of organising, as well as the question of 'what we are organising for' have been absent in the relevant debates within trade unions organisations. Thus, organising has remained a technical issue (Hyman 2007).

The issues examined, also have an echo on the relationship between trade unions and the unemployed, which is, however, more complex and problematic. This relationship can have a more institutionalized character, through the involvement of unions in

⁴ According to the ideal types of trade unions identities presented by Hyman (1997) class-oriented trade unions aim mainly to the protection of class interests and have an anticapitalistic agenda. They favor militant actions and can be considered as sort of "schools of war" within the capital-labor struggle.

unemployment schemes in Ghent system countries⁵. In this case, trade unions seem to better integrate the defence of unemployment interests in their structures and strategies. In non-Ghent system countries, the ties between unions and the unemployed are usually weaker (Faniel 2012). This ambiguous position of unions towards the unemployed is more manifest when it pertains to the means that unions use in order to organise the unemployed. Faniel (2012, 132) rises the question whether the unemployed should be included “inside professional unions, together with the active rank-and-file? Or on a separate basis, gathering all the unemployed despite their professional skills?” As she points out, when groups are specifically created for the unemployed, it seems they never have the same status and the same weight as professional unions in terms of decision making.

In practice, regardless of the adopted strategy, top level unions are quite hesitant to dedicate the necessary resources, even if their bottom-level unions are more open to such strategies. Generally, even if unions often adopt an extensive claim, concentrating on class solidarity, structuring solidarity between permanent and precarious workers and the unemployed is not an easy task to accomplish and, very often, formal trade unions continue to adopt exclusion practices (Faniel 2012), as we will see in the Greek case.

3. Trade Unions in Greece confronting ‘old’ and ‘new’ challenges

It is commonly accepted that Greek trade unionism has been going through a structural crisis, which has been further exacerbated during the period of the Memoranda. Most of the problems that Greek trade unions are facing during the crisis are related to pre-existent dysfunctions of the Greek industrial relations system and labour movement (Kapsalis 2012). During its history, the Greek system of industrial relations has experienced a long period of state interventionism that has left its mark on labour market regulation, collective bargaining structures and the functioning of trade unions (Zambarloukou 2006).

Since the 1980s, and especially after the 1990s, there have been signs indicating the minimization of state intervention and the strengthening of social partners’ collective autonomy. However, this does not mean that unions have become truly autonomous,

⁵ This pertains to ‘a system of voluntary unemployment insurance that is subsidized by public authorities and in which trade unions (or linked funds) provide benefits to the unemployed’ (Van Rie, Marx and Horemans 2011, 4)

since state interventionism has given place to a ‘colonization’ of interest groups and of representation by political parties, and a party tutelage of trade unions has predominated (Lavdas 2005). Thus, to this day, trade unionism remains very politicized. The main political parties of the time were directly represented in official trade union structures through organised fractions. Even though, typically, decisions within trade unions were made via internal procedures, in practice, extra-union political centres were the ones who gave the mandate (Kapsalis 2012).

At the national level, representation is relatively centralized, through the existence of two trade union confederations, i.e., GSEE (Greek General Confederation of Labour) organizing employees in private sector and in public utilities and ADEDY (Greek Confederation of Public Servants) which represents civil servants. Union density has been experiencing a decline, from about 37.1%⁶ in 1992 to 25.4 % in 2011⁷. Among the factors that have provoked this union density decline in Greece, representation crisis as well as a crisis of confidence within the existing structures seem to have played a crucial role. Similarly to other national contexts, several categories of workers are under-represented by trade unions (Kapsalis 2012; Kouzis 2007; Kretsos 2011a; Kretsos 2011a, 2012). Regarding the socio-demographic characteristics of workers organised in trade unions, a survey by VPRC (2010) on behalf of GSEE has shown that these are mainly men, between 35 and 54 years old, with a higher level of education, working in full-time and permanent employment positions, mainly in the public sector and public utilities companies, and receiving an average monthly salary between 900€ and 2,000€.

The confidence crisis does not so much concern trade unionism itself. It has more to do with the distrust of existing trade union ‘elites’ or leaders, and of the trade unions’ *modus operandi*. Surveys have shown that the rate of dissatisfaction towards trade union organisations was very important, even in workplaces with a strong trade union presence. In the previously cited research (VPRC, 2010), 55% of respondents (whether organised or not) considered trade unions ineffective with regards to defending the workers’ rights, while 69% declared they did not trust trade unions (71% of non-organised and 65% of organised workers). Additionally, respondents demonstrated a general distrust towards the two major confederations, i.e., 66% towards GSEE (while

⁶Available from: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/national-contributions/greece/trade-union-strategies-to-recruit-new-groups-of-workers-greece>

⁷ ICTWSS Database: Database on Institutional Characteristics of Trade Unions, Wage Setting, State Intervention and Social Pacts, in 34 countries between 1960 and 2012, compiled by Jelle Visser, at the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies AIAS, University of Amsterdam, Version 4, April 2013 (Available from: <http://www.uva-aias.net/207>)

among private sector workers, only 22% declared they trusted GSEE) and 66% in the case of ADEDY (while only 30% of public sector employees declared they trusted ADEDY). Despite the distrust, 77% of workers and the unemployed considered that trade unions are generally useful.

This attitude of distrust towards the organised trade union movement was linked to a generalised feeling that dependencies and political interests were often placed above the claims and interests of the workers. In addition, the under-representation of trade unions in the private sector and their over-representation in public enterprises and the public sector created the feeling that Greek trade unionism has been a unionism of the 'more protected' groups of workers. Lastly, trade unionism in Greece could be characterized as an emblematic example of 'bureaucratic unionism'⁸. Given the above characteristics, the distance of certain categories of workers to the existing trade union structures seemed inevitable. The outcome of this situation seems to be a combination of 'desyndicalization', 'asyndicalization' (Dufour and Hege 2010) or even 'countersyndicalization' processes.

In this context – and before the fiscal crisis – the question was what the official and major Greek trade unions had done to address the crisis of representation and legitimacy. In reality, union leaders did not perceive the decline of union density as a 'crisis signal'. Thus, no strategic effort of renewal has taken place, and for several reasons.

A first set of reasons relates to the available resources (political, financial and institutional). Until very recently, the power of Greek unions did not depend on their number of members and their presence at the workplace, but was largely reaffirmed by the existence of a political context, favourable to unions in particular, because of the links between political parties and trade unions, described previously. A second explanation lies in the trade unions' means of financing. Up to 2012, the major financial resource of the GSEE has been the state – controlled OEE (Foyer of Labour). A final explanation lies in the principle of the extension clause of collective agreements, which automatically covered most workers in the private sector, regardless if they were members of a union or not. A second set of reasons relates to objective obstacles, such as the weak union presence or even total absence of unions in SMEs and the high number of undeclared workers.

Nevertheless, despite available resources or 'objective obstacles', the non-investment in organising and recruiting strategies has also been a matter of choices and uneven positions towards precarious workers and the unemployed. In reality, 'or-

⁸ In the sense of a "a corrosive pattern of internal social relations manifest in a differential distribution of expertise and activism; in a dependence of the mass of union members on the initiative and experience of a relatively small group of leaders – both official and 'unofficial'" (Hyman, 1989 in Camfield 2013,137).

ganising the unorganised' and mobilising the non-unionized workers did not seem crucial and remained a low-priority issue for official Greek trade unions (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou 2015). Official unions have often adopted (and often continue to adopt) a position of exclusion towards contingent workers, as we have seen in the case of the OME-OTE union, the Federation of Employees at OTE (National Telecommunication Companies) with regard to non-permanent workers at Cosmote (OTE's mobile telephony subsidiary) (Kornelakis and Voskeritsian 2016) or in the case of the Trade Union of the National Bank of Greece, towards the Trade Union of Employees in the Outsourcing Companies of the National Bank of Greece (Ethnodata). It appears that what has been valid for the US labour movement in previous decades, might also be pertinent to Greek unions today (Reuben-Shemia 2017). Specifically, according to Bronfenbrenner (2006, 47),

For too many decades unions in the USA failed to accept responsibility for their declining numbers and power. Not only did they continue to blame external forces for their organizing difficulties, but they also continued to seek to be rescued by their political allies, blinded by the belief that any organizing renewal was entirely dependent on first achieving significant labour law reform. In doing so they failed to understand that the deteriorating legal climate for organizing has always been a direct result of their declining numbers and political power. In fact, only through organizing massive numbers of new members in every sector of the economy, will US unions once again have the political leverage to ensure more progressive and more effective labour legislation.

Trying to overcome the above tendencies, some segments of the Greek trade union movement founded the All-Workers Militant Front (PAME). PAME is critical of the official positions and leadership of GSEE. It opposes the consensual, governmental and capital-friendly goals of GSEE that support the growth of the national economy and its further integration in the European Union. PAME was founded in 1999 with the participation of 230 trade unions, 18 branch and peripheral associations and 2,500 elected union members. It is mainly influenced by the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and, throughout the years, has managed to unionize many workers and employees in the private sector (Bithymitris 2010).

Additionally, since the late 1990s, and mainly during the 2000s⁹, unionization procedures of contingent workers in workplaces where flexible work predominated, and/or at the sectoral level, were launched in various sectors (catering services, courier postal

⁹ There are of course some exceptions such as the BOPU (book workers union) that is an older union reestablished in 1992 (Kretsos 2000a).

companies, telecommunications, private schools, cleaning services, publishing houses). In 2009, primary unions based in Athens founded the Primary Unions' Coordination (*Syntonismos Protovathmion Somation*), as an alternative to the coordination structure of GSEE (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou 2015; Vogiatzoglou 2014). The Coordination has managed to unionize workers who work under precarious conditions and it opposes both the 'governmental' syndicalism of GSEE and ADEDY and the partisan-controlled syndicalism of PAME.

The unions in question mainly feature left-wing or anarchist-oriented leadership, accompanied by a strong presence of rank-and-file, left-wing labour activists (Kretsos 2011a; Kretsos 2011b). As Kretsos (2011a, 463) points out,

The vast majority of those union organizations bear all the characteristics of social movement unionism as Moody (1997) has defined them, militant in collective bargaining, deeply democratic and participative and placing an importance on rank-and-file activism.

Given this, they often engaged in traditional social movement activities (such as demonstrations and solidarity campaigns) and collaborated with non-labour social movement organisations. Since they were operating in workplaces comprising both precarious and non-precarious workers, they chose to relate their contingent work-related claims with a more general setting of working-class struggles (Mattoni and Vogiatzoglou 2014, 61).

As to their allies, the unions in question were much more willing to collaborate with other precarious workers' unions or non-labour social movement organisations, than with more traditional trade union organisations. As in other contexts, there seems to exist a relationship of mutual suspicion between official trade unions and grassroots rank-and-file unions (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2017). Their position towards GSEE is complex and not unanimous (Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou 2015; Vogiatzoglou 2014). Generally, the unions in question are suspicious towards trade union elites and bureaucracy. In practice however, some of them participate institutionally in official trade unions structures and apparatuses, even if their leaders oppose GSEE's strategies and modus operandi (Vogiatzoglou 2014).

The recent fiscal crisis, as well as the austerity measures voted in the framework of the Memoranda since 2010, radically changed the landscape of trade unions. With regard to 'official' trade unions, the crisis constituted a major challenge, while it also brought to light the aforementioned, pre-existing dysfunctions. The extended legal flexibilization and the actual precarization of employment relations, the unprecedented increase of unemployment rates, as well as the dismantling of the collective bar-

gaining framework constituted a negative context for trade union action. At the same time, 'official' trade unions faced intra-union ruptures, while the relations between trade union fractions and their traditional political allies have been severely shaken and the crisis has shifted political alignments and affiliations. However, even though union officials are aware of the new challenges, they hesitate to proceed to drastic structural changes (Vogiatzoglou 2014). Within the framework of the crisis, and lacking a tradition of 'organising' and 'recruiting' strategies, official trade unions in Greece have mainly invested in traditional collective bargaining actions and strikes.

The severe austerity measures, the wage cuts and the deteriorating labour conditions that were voted in the framework of the bailout Memoranda with the Troika (EU, ECB, IMF) and implemented by all Greek government administrations since 2010, have triggered a massive anti-austerity protest campaign. Greek trade unions were one of the main pillars of this campaign – the other being the political parties of the left (Kanellopoulos, Kostopoulos, Papanikolopoulos, and Rongas 2017). GSEE and ADEDY called numerous general strikes and most of these strikes were accompanied by impressive demonstrations in Athens and other large cities in Greece. The anti-austerity campaign reached its peak in 2011-12 and, as a side effect, it caused the destabilization of the Greek political system (Kanellopoulos and Kousis 2018).

These massive protests were carried out with the participation of numerous people who were not unionized and/or were unemployed or not even active in the labour force (Rudig and Kariotis 2013). The more organised forces articulated the main claims of the campaign. These forces were the labour confederations and the parties of the left. The claims of the Greek anti-austerity campaign have not yet been fully explored. However, preliminary research has shown that most of the claims were defensive; an attempt to protect the wages and the labour conditions of the most secure segment of the labour force (Kanellopoulos and Kostopoulos 2014).

As Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou (2015, 220) point out, 'this overemphasis on general strike activity and lobbying strategies aimed at influencing major political parties, has not been effective in improving the situation for an increasingly precarious workforce in the Greek employment landscape'. In fact, the positions and the rights of the unemployed and those working under precarious conditions were generally not taken into consideration. Although the numbers of unemployed and precarious workers have very much increased and are now the highest in the EU, the big union confederations did very little. While most unemployed workers in Greece are not receiving any unem-

ployment benefits, and most precarious workers are not unionized, the only thing that the GSEE achieved, was to create an observatory of the crisis¹⁰.

Inside the official Greek trade union movement, little has changed during and because of the crisis. PASKE, which used to be attached to the socialist party PASOK and has been its trade union faction, is still controlling GSEE and the large unions in public utilities companies. PASKE is no longer directly controlled by PASOK, but this does not mean that it has altered its rather conservative approach or its goals of contributing in the growth of the national economy. Many ex-PASKE unionists became members of SYRIZA, especially after SYRIZA entered parliament. But this does not constitute a significant change, since these unionists continue to practice the same old consensual and capital-friendly 'governmental unionism', this time in accordance with the SYRIZA-ANEL¹¹ coalition government.

As to grassroots contingent worker unions, Mattonni and Vogiatzoglou (2014, 62) mention that:

The economic crisis brought nonetheless with it some relevant transformations with regard to the scope of precarious workers mobilizations, and the forms of collective action, both with regard to contentious performances in the strict sense and with regard to other kinds of collective actions that did not involve protests.

In the midst of the crisis, new unions emerged, while grassroots unions strongly participated in all anti-austerity protests. Additionally, new initiatives appeared, such as the community-based Workers' Clubs (*Ergatikes Leshes*), which organise activities beyond the limits of the workplace and address, not only contingent workers, but also those employed in very small companies (without a trade union presence), as well as the unemployed. Many of them have emerged as a response to what was perceived as a humanitarian crisis, caused by the austerity measures (Vogiatzoglou 2014).

However, practice and relevant research have shown that the unions in question are faced with difficulties. A first set of reasons relates to their capacity to intervene effectively and to expand their scope. According to Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou (2015), the contingent workers' unions are in a sense "paying the price" of trying to secure their relative autonomy from political parties and the government, since they have limited

¹⁰ <http://ineobservatory.gr/>

¹¹ ANEL (Independent Greeks) is a far-right split of the centre-right party of New Democracy (ND). ANEL split from ND in 2012 because their MPs were against of the 2nd Memorandum that ND supported. In January 2015 ANEL formed a coalition 'anti-Memorandum' government with radical left SYRIZA. In August 2015, this government signed the 3rd Memorandum and after the September 2015 snap elections SYRIZA and ANEL renewed their alliance.

access to labour market regulatory structures. Additionally, operating mainly at specific workplaces and sectors, they face difficulties in expanding their scope, while – despite their motivations – they are having difficulties in approaching the unemployed. Secondly, there is always an inherent risk of “bureaucratization”. Moreover, as these unions operate mainly inside the workplace, their repertoire of action is largely centred on workplace-based activities, while their outward-looking actions are limited to participation in protests and strikes. Finally, the high unemployment rates in some of the sectors where these unions intervene, also have a negative effect on unionization.

4. Perceptions of grassroots and rank-and-file trade unionists and labour activists regarding solidarity actions towards contingent workers and the unemployed

The interviews with trade unionists and labour activists were conducted in the framework of the TransSOL project. Thirty qualitative interviews were conducted in each of the project’s eight countries, with participants/representatives of ‘transnational, innovative, informal, solidarity organisations’, in 2016¹². The purposive sample consists of representatives and participants from selective community settings, 10 from each of the target group fields (unemployment, disability, and migration): 5 from charity/practical help/service organisations and 5 from protest/social movement/policy oriented organisations. The selection of interviewees followed a 2-step-procedure; the first step guided the interviewer in the selection of groups/organisations and the second step in the selection of the persons to be interviewed. In the first step, organisations/groups were prioritised as follows (starting from point 1 and continuing to point 2 and below, only if unable to recruit from point 1): 1) informal, non-professional groups, 2) NGOs without paid staff, 3) NGOs with few members of staff, 4) protest-oriented groups, 5) transnational social movement organisations. In the second step, respondents with enough variance in terms of age, gender and mobility were selected.

Based on the above criteria, the data we gathered stems mainly from grassroots and rank-and-file trade unions. Some of them are informal organisations (in the sense that they are not officially recognized trade unions), while others have a more formal organ-

¹² More information for the method applied could be found at: TransSOL: Integrated Report on Reflective Forms of Transnational Solidarity. Deliverable 2.1. Part III. Qualitative Interviews with Representatives of Innovative Transnational Solidarity Organisations (Available from: <http://transsol.eu/files/2016/12/Integrated-Report-on-Reflective-Forms-of-Transnational-Solidarity.pdf>)

isational structure. In any case, they are also clearly non-professional and, to a large part, protest oriented. They deliberately choose to be 'outside' or not to have close relations to the 'official' and more 'institutionalized' trade union structures, and have a more radical leftist and/or anarcho-syndicalist orientation.

Among other areas, the interviews focused on issues such as interested representation and solidarity (at the national and the transnational level), as well as on the means of action. A relevant question we asked the interviewees from these groups was '*who are the target groups/persons of their action? Or those that can most benefit from it?*' With this question, we aimed to learn whether the unemployed and/or precarious workers are among the beneficiaries of their action and to what extent they are in solidarity with them. A second set of questions dealt with the actual perceptions of solidarity, for example, *how do they define it? Is it meaningful? Is it helpful to the targeted groups? Are there any limits to solidarity?*

The target groups of their union action are working-class people. Besides the employed (whether in permanent or contingent employment conditions), the unemployed¹³ and immigrants¹⁴ are also among their target groups. Some of them conduct innovative actions and initiatives for contingent workers and the unemployed, such as: the issuing of unemployment cards to all members of the unions, in order to secure discounts, the provision of insurance coverage to those working as self-employed, the admission of precarious workers into public sector unions, the on-the-spot surveillance of employers to ensure that they do not hire workers without insurance, the organisation of consumer campaigns in order to boycott certain shops or company products, neighbourhood-level activities, the creation of mutual aid funds for the unemployed or of 'solidarity' funds, etc.

The most revealing finding from our data is that the members of these rank-and-file trade unions and other grassroots labour groups do not actually distinguish between workers and the unemployed or precarious workers.

A member of an anarcho-syndicalist organisation which is very active in transnational actions, told us:

¹³ In some of the unions, the unemployed are also allowed to be union members and benefit from the union's actions.

¹⁴ Since many of them are precarious workers and very few are unionized. Thus, most of the unions examined try to unionize immigrants and represent their working rights.

... [We] aim at the world of labour... The unemployed, of course, but also immigrants, as potential precarious workers and even those who are now being trained to become future workers.

A representative of a protest-oriented and very militant trade union, who is active in the publication sector, informed us that:

The unemployed of our sector are rightful members of our union, the same goes for part-time or other 'flexible' workers... if one of us gets fired, he or she remains a member of the union.

The union in question is against flexible forms of labour, they ask for more unemployment benefits, applying to the entire working force, and they have mobilized multiple times for unemployment issues.

The following narrative comes from a participant from a worker-recovered and self-managed factory. The union has no hierarchical structure and the board exists only for formal reasons. The workers decided to produce cheap and environmentally friendly products, while at the same time they 'opened up' the factory to society and hosted cultural and social actions/events (films, concerts, bazaars without intermediaries, etc.). They actively participate in strikes, while they also host a dedicated space where they gather things for immigrants, and they have also created an infirmary, where all local workers have access to free medical care. As the workers' respondent told us:

The issue of unemployment and of precarious forms of labour is not an issue of solidarity. It is an issue of a common struggle... the best example for helping the unemployed and precarious workers is the success of self-management experiments where the workers take control of the means of production and put them in the service of the commons... as part of the labour movement and the social movement, we are in solidarity with all struggles. In practice, we are supporting immigrants and all those who are in need.

Another emblematic example of such a perception of solidarity is that of a network of independent, autonomous, militant organisations with a strong leftist, anti-capitalistic orientation that act in opposition to traditional trade unionism, which they consider as governmental and dependent on political parties. Their union's action does not only concern their branch/profession, but the entire working class, since they consider that the question of education is broader than the narrow interests of their profession. As a collective, they do not consider the support towards precarious workers

and the unemployed as a solidarity issue, as they see themselves as part of a class that has common interests with other workers. As one of their representatives told us:

We are not talking about solidarity, but about the common struggle of workers and the unemployed... we are together

The most emblematic case of an organised effort by the unemployed to act and advance their rights, is that of a protest-oriented union, focusing its action specifically on the unemployed and on precarious workers. The union in question tries to safeguard the unemployment allowance, as well as free transportation for the unemployed (in means of public transportation) and free medical care. The union cooperates with other radical, primary-level unions and self-managed collectives.

Another case is that of a union representing workers in NGOs. The union in question was created to protect workers' rights in NGOs, as they discovered an extended arbitrariness on behalf of NGO employers, towards workers, regarding labour rights (e.g., undeclared work, non-paid overtime work). The union only covers workers in NGOs, as its statute does not formally permit the registration of unemployed persons in the union, but as their representative told us:

At this moment, we are all precarious workers.

This overall uncertainty regarding the working condition in crisis-ridden Greece is reflected in the perceptions of solidarity, demonstrated by our respondents. An interviewee from a protest-oriented, grassroots primary union, representing waiters and cooks, said the following:

We have formed a money deposit to support the unemployed... solidarity unifies people... the structures of solidarity for unemployed and precarious workers is what is needed, but this must not be done separately... it has to be done from inside the unions.

The interviewee representing a telecommunications company union, which is a member of the Federation of private sector Employees, told us that:

Our union was formed because of solidarity; it is our basic belief. We try to be in solidarity with every union, every labour club or labour activist and, of course, with the unemployed.

Almost all the respondents in our sample are accusing big Labour Confederations in Greece, both in the private and the public sector, of having done very little to defend the rights of workers. The main accusation is that these Confederations, which are the official representatives of workers, are bureaucratized and do not include unemployed and precarious workers in their ranks. But, with the eruption of the economic crisis in Greece, unemployment rose dramatically, and almost one out of three workers is now unemployed. Additionally, those who are still working are increasingly employed in precarious jobs and work conditions.

The rank-and-file unions in our study represent a bottom-up reaction to the inefficacy of the official union movement. As one representative of a national-level union, covering all technical occupations in construction companies (e.g., geologists, engineers, architects, foremen, etc.) said:

In Greece, there are many differentiations between private/public sector workers, between full-time/part-time workers but because of the extent of the crisis in the last years there have been steps towards unification... as long as the crisis becomes deeper, solidarity movements become sharper.

The interviewee from the pre-cited union, focusing its action specifically on the unemployed and precarious workers, went further by saying that:

We accept immigrants in our union... the issues of unemployment and precarity do not have a national identity; they have a class identity.

The respondent from the union that is active in the publication sector was less optimistic:

It is terrible that we don't have massive organisations for the unemployed... where are the unemployed?... If the unemployed were mobilized... we are talking about more than one million people... Is it disappointment?... People prefer to stay at home? Is it depression?

A possible answer to these questions seems to be provided by the interviewee from the worker-recovered and self-managed factory:

The crisis helped us to understand and realize our power, and how much this power can be further strengthened through forms of cooperation and solidarity.

5. Conclusions

The elements presented in the former section confirm the position that the identity of trade unions affects the interests with which they identify, as well as the agenda they follow. Respondents appeared to share a strong identification with the working class, and their unionization and union activity aims not only to protect and advance their sectoral and/or professional interests, but also to advance the causes of the entire working class. Thus, having a working class-oriented identity, discourse and framework of action, as well as a broad perception of solidarity (as class solidarity), the unions examined in the framework of the TransSol project adopt more inclusive strategies towards contingent workers and/or the unemployed (whether these are Greek or immigrants) and cordially support labour solidarity, considering that within the class struggle, no differentiations must be made. Hence, according to the respondents, we should not perceive labour solidarity so much as a solidarity towards the most vulnerable sections of the labour market, but more as a common struggle of the working class, where everyone holds an equal position within trade unions, whether working in the public or private sector, in permanent full-time employment conditions or in contingent work or being unemployed. Trade unions remain the main vehicles of class solidarity and class struggle, but they should try to avoid bureaucratization and the formation of hierarchical organisational structures.

The economic crisis seems to have had a twofold impact on the activity of the unions examined. In some cases, the rise of unemployment and the precarization of employment conditions made the work of the unions more problematic, due to the difficulty to provide practical help to the rising number of unemployed and precarious workers. Additionally, in some unions, trade union membership has been reduced, while many of the remaining members became inactive. Nevertheless, the crisis-related problems in the labour market also triggered solidarity. Some of these unions were created during and because of the crisis, precisely in order to help precarious workers and the unemployed. Therefore, their activities and number of active members are expanding. Additionally, according to our respondents, the most important positive effect has been the rise of worker consciousness with regard to the need to unionize and – mostly – to become active. Almost all our respondents discerned a rise in labour consciousness and solidarity among the unemployed and those working, and also among Greek and immigrant workers, since the eruption of the financial crisis. Even among unions that lost members, this cognitive outcome is considered very important.

Most of the unions under examination in this article, have shown a strong capacity for innovation, regarding practical support towards precarious workers or unemployed-

ment. However, the impact of these grassroots and rank-and-file unions should not be overestimated. They are only representing very few workers, mainly in Athens and Thessaloniki, and their reach is usually limited to those who are already familiar with the left extra-parliamentary and/or the anarcho-syndicalist discourse. Despite their declared willingness to support labour solidarity actions, due to the lack of infrastructural and material 'resources', they are very weak to offer practical help and/or to press towards the inclusion of precarious and unemployed workers in the system of interest representation. Therefore, following the definition of union power resources suggested by Lévesque and Murray (2010), their power seems to derive more from resources such as internal solidarity (referring to the existence of cohesive collective identities and of deliberative vitality related to the participation of members in the life of their union), their network embeddedness or external solidarity (referring to their links with other unions, groups and social movements) and their working-class-oriented 'narrative resources' that frame their actions, while the infrastructural and material resources play a secondary role.

As to 'official' Greek trade unionism, it seems that it is still dominant in the field, but with a significant retreat in terms of legitimacy and effectiveness. On the one hand, during the 'Memoranda' era, GSEE and ADEDY did not manage to protect labour interests and, on the other hand, new grassroots trade unions and labour clubs are being formed and are fighting for working-class rights at the workplace. Following the official statements and discourse, 'institutional' trade unions also promote labour solidarity and the working-class movement. However, in practice, their solidarity to the weakest and most vulnerable segments of the labour force remains very abstract (Kretsos 2011a; Kretsos 2011b; Kretsos and Vogiatzoglou 2015). Very often, following an 'insider-outsider' approach, their main strategy and position towards unemployed and/or contingent workers is that of exclusion, based on a twofold argument. This strategy of exclusion, as Heery (2009) pointed out, is driven by a general criticism regarding contingent work and by an effort to protect workers from insecure employment and existing members from competition within the labour market; exclusion is inevitable because the unions' statute does not permit the inclusion, for example, of contingent workers. The fiscal crisis has altered the Greek political system, but it did not manage to also drastically alter the ways and the perceptions of Greek 'institutional' and formal trade unionism.

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