

The Fight for Independent Working Class Politics in the “Third World”, by Paul Hampton

“But with the development of industry the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more... Thereupon the workers begin to form combinations (trade unions) against the bourgeois; they club together in order to keep up the rate of wages; they found permanent associations in order to make provision beforehand for these occasional revolts...

The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of modern industry, therefore cuts from under the feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own gravediggers.”

Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848).

“The influence of the proletariat is determined by its role in the modern economy. The nation’s most powerful means of production depend directly on the workers... While the peasantry is scattered over the entire countryside, the proletariat is concentrated in large masses in the factories and industrial centres. It forms the nucleus of the population in every town of political or economic importance, and all the advantages of the town in a capitalist country – concentration of the productive forces, the means of production, the most active elements of the population, the greatest cultural benefits – are naturally transformed into class advantages for the proletariat. Its self-determination as a class has developed with a rapidity unequalled in history”

Leon Trotsky, *1905*, (1922).

This report evaluates some of the broad tendencies operating in the world today.

- Firstly, it registers the extent of capitalist development over the last fifty years, in some countries outside of the advanced capitalist states.
- Secondly it shows that capitalist development has created large working classes, the essential social agent in our vision of socialism.
- Thirdly it summarises some of the struggles of the working class in the “Third World”, showing that our class continues to fight for its own self-liberation.

The report is a call for comrades to study the struggles in these countries, to make direct links with workers’ organisations and socialists, and to write about them in our publications.

The report does not discuss some important issues, such as relations in the countryside, nor does it say much about the millions of workers in the informal sector. However it covers countries that contain 60% of the world’s population, producing more than a quarter of the world’s output. As well as being large economies, these countries also have substantial working classes and most cases, examples of militant workers’ struggles and independent labour movements.

Combined and uneven capitalist development

Capitalist development is a fact of the last fifty years. World GDP increased six-fold from 1950 to 1998, with an average growth rate of nearly 4% a year, according to the OECD.

During the so-called “golden age”, 1950-73, world GDP grew by almost 5% a year; over the “neo-liberal” period since 1973 the world economy has grown by 3% a year. In both periods growth was faster than at any time in history – the world economy is estimated to have grown by under 2% a year between 1913 and 1950, and just over 2% a year between 1870 and 1913.

Real GDP per capita rose by 2.1% a year between 1950 and 1998. This compares with less than 1% per annum between 1820 and 1950. The period since 1973 has seen a slowdown, but growth is still higher than before 1950. Between 1950 and 1973, per capita GDP grew 2.9% a year; since 1973 it has grown by 1.3% a year.

Capitalist development has been very uneven. The advanced capitalist countries of Europe, North America, and Japan produce over half the world’s output, as they have done for over a century. Asia produces a quarter of the world’s output, and contains half the world’s population. The gap between the richest and poorest regions of the world, measured by per capita income in 1870 was 5:1. By 1950 the ratio was 15:1, by 1973 it was 13:1 – but by 1998 the gap was 19:1.

Growing unevenness is reflected in growth rates between regions and countries. Between 1950 and 1973, Japan’s GDP grew by over 9% a year, Western Europe by 4.8% a year, and Africa by 4.4% a year. However, since 1973 Asia (excluding Japan) has grown by 5.5% a year; whereas Africa grew by 2.7% a year. In the 1980s many Latin American economies contracted in real terms. Ghana, Indonesia and South Korea had comparable (low) levels of GDP per capita in 1950. Ghana is now barely any better off in real terms at all, Indonesia is three times richer and South Korea is now comparable with Portugal and Spain.

State-led authoritarian industrialisation

There has been rapid capitalist development in parts of “Third World” since the Second World War. In the half century since 1950, Asia has been the fastest growing part of the world economy. In 1950 Asia accounted for 18.5% of world output; by 1998 that share had doubled. Rapid industrialisation has also been accompanied by rapid urbanisation.

State-led authoritarian industrialisation – what Lenin called the “Prussian road” - has been the norm in the “Third World”. Most states have pursued an early phase of import-substitution, in which consumer goods were produced using the revenues from the export of primary products. This was followed by a further phase – sometimes called “industrial deepening” - with the development of a capital goods sector using foreign capital. The strategy of export-orientated industrialisation has been used in Asia, combined with import substitution and sponsorship from the US and Japan.

The state in the “Third World” has substituted for weak private capitalist classes, but ultimately industrialisation has produced a private bourgeoisie. The state generates this domestic bourgeoisie by creating monopolies, offering credit and paying subsidies. Although integrated into international circuits of capital and is part of a cohesive international capitalist class, these bourgeoisies are not satraps of multinational capital, nor are they merely comprador classes. They have their own interests, their own factions of industrial and finance capital, their own political parties.

Business is essentially a conservative political force. Capitalist ownership of the means of production ensures that the bourgeoisie rules socially and economically – without requiring a democratic political system. The liberal view, summed up as “no bourgeoisie, no democracy” is false – in fact the bourgeoisie have generally supported authoritarian governments – at least as long as the regime established a framework for capital accumulation.

The new working class

Over the last half century, the working class has grown in size and social weight as capitalism has developed. In the 15 countries considered here, there were 47 million industrial workers in 1950 – the figure by 2000 had risen to 358 million, a seven-fold increase in half a century.

Industrial development and the creation of a world market have formed large working classes that have entered into class struggle. The objective pre-requisites for international socialism have thereby developed to a greater degree than ever before.

For us the working class is the active historical agency – not simply the passive object of the designs of the ruling class and its state. Working class action has also shaped the particular histories of the countries under consideration here, and shaped the policies pursued by different ruling classes.

The working class is the democratic class – it has consistently fought against military and authoritarian rule and for democratic rights. In Brazil and South Korea, the working class was the central force that brought about the end of military rule. In South Africa the working class was the social force that disrupted apartheid. In Thailand, workers rallied to thwart the military coup in 1992. In Indonesia, the strike wave of the 1990s prefigured and inspired the movement against Suharto. In Pakistan, the working class has been the only force to oppose both the military and the fundamentalists. And in China, the Tiananmen Square massacre and the struggles waged since for independent unions is testimony to the ongoing fight of the working class against the Stalinist regime.

New labour movements

Labour movements have often been political excluded, and in some cases neutered, as part of the industrialisation strategy. Nevertheless the development of capitalism created openings for labour movements to emerge. In South Africa, Brazil and Korea, militant movements have developed in areas of industrial growth and concentration. Large strike waves erupted after periods of industrial quiescence in heavy industries that had grown up during recent industrialisation. They were concentrated in large factories among young, relatively skilled workers.

Labour movements have developed, fighting for working class political representation - for free trade unionism, for bourgeois democratic rights and for welfare states. Just like in advanced capitalist states, many of these movements have formed or sought to form national federations. Some have tried to represent the working class politically in parliament and in local councils. In Argentina scores of factories are currently under workers control, while in Iran, workers created *shoras* (workers' councils) at the height of the revolution against the shah.

Rapid industrialisation has tended to produce militant unionism. However there is no mechanical correspondence between industrialisation and the development of strong working class movements. There are obstacles such as repression, high capital mobility and the reserve army of labour, which have hampered the growth of labour movements.

There has not been a linear development of more factories, then more workers and then more struggle. The class struggle in these countries generally ebbed in the 1990s, and in some cases stagnated. Where it has risen - in Indonesia for example - the movements have not yet attained the heights of the earlier struggles in Brazil and South Africa.

Trade union bureaucracies have developed in these countries just as they did in advanced capitalist states. Sometimes they were directly brought into being by the state to control the working class (e.g. in China and Brazil) – others have grown up under democratic regimes. The labour aristocracy has domestic roots – a consequence of domestic capital accumulation, the state and the class struggle.

There have been some attempts at working class political representation. Only in Brazil has a mass workers' party developed, but the Workers' Party (PT) has moved far from its militant, working class origins. COSATU could have formed a workers' party in the 1980s, but opted to become a satellite of the ANC. Workers' candidates have stood in elections in South Africa, Korea, Pakistan and the Philippines – but with only limited trade union backing. In China and Iran, there are no political structures that workers can utilise.

The role of organised activists, especially Marxists, has been and is crucial. Inspirational struggles by the FNPBI in Indonesia and SITEMEX in Mexico have been the result of long-term hard slogging to organise workers, sometimes starting outside the workplace. Similar processes took place in South Africa, Brazil and Korea prior to their strike waves.

The ICFTU is now the dominant voice in world trade unionism – growing from 87 million members in 1988 to 155 million by the end of 2000. Across the globe, the actual numbers of workers in unions has increased since 1950, and the number of workers in genuinely free trade unions has never been higher. However this growth has slowed significantly since 1990, and trade union density – the proportion of trade unionists compared to the total number of workers, has mostly stagnated in the last decade.

Globalisation and imperialism

Lenin based his theory of imperialism on the actual tendencies in the world economy during the period he lived in. His writings, including *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, recognised that capitalism, and with it the size of the working class, would continue to grow as long as the system was not overthrown. He did not expect the relations between different states to remain frozen forever.

However Lenin's emphasis on the moribund and decaying aspects of imperialism, which was worked into a theory by the Stalinists that capitalism could not develop in the "Third World", has proven to be wrong. Capitalist development in these countries has demonstrated the falsity of dependency theories. The concept of a homogenous "Third World" has been exploded by industrial development and workers' struggles since 1950.

If globalisation means the creation of a world market for capital, and the transformation of the entire world into the capitalist mode of production, it also means the creation of a large class of wage-workers who can make socialism. Globalisation and imperialism ultimately "work for us", as Rosa Luxemburg put it, because they create the material preconditions for the abolition of capitalist domination and class society in general.

The new era of globalisation has both recomposed the working class and made opportunities for organising and international solidarity. Some argue that the international mobility of capital, particularly in the low-wage, export-orientated industries that have underpinned industrial development since the 1980s, has meant a global weakening of labour's bargaining power. Without underestimating the difficulties for organising, we need to register that some workers have found it easier to form unions in factories owned or sub-contracted by foreign firms. Overseas demand for goods, the quality control measures required in such industry, coupled with the importance multinationals attach to their brand name, have given workers more leverage with local employers to establish unions and win improvements.

Solidarity and the role of Marxists

Trotsky summed up the job of Marxists as: to say what is, to face reality squarely, to call things by their right names, to speak the truth, no matter how bitter it may be, to base our programme on the logic of the class struggle.

Our ideological task is to grasp the essence of the contemporary phase of world capitalism, to identify what is specific to this phase, its regime of capital accumulation, its methods of exploitation and domination. A socialist alternative can only transcend the structures of capitalism today if it builds on the material forms that capitalism has created.

The development of the working class across the globe also establishes the lines upon which we can make international solidarity. The struggles of the working class are the lines along which we can help create a new workers' international. Within the No Sweat campaign we can argue for a focus on working class movements that challenge the system.

We should be wary of the ambiguous role of NGOs. Some have helped workers' organisations to develop; others have worked against class independence and workers' self-liberation. We should also warn against the reactionary anti-capitalists – the seminal experience of Iran in 1979 showed the attitude of political Islam towards the working class. Socialists in Pakistan and Indonesia have learned the same lesson from bitter experience.

The role of working class socialist activists is indispensable. Socialists in the “Third World” have been central to organising action, to providing education for workers and to linking together different struggles. International solidarity has also helped workers gain higher wages and improved conditions, gain reinstatement when victimised, and consolidate their organisations. The militant labour movements described here are not simply the result of economic processes - they are also a product of conscious intervention by workers and organised socialists.

China

Political economy

China is ruled by the Communist Party (CCP) and has been a Stalinist state since 1949. In 1978 Deng Xiaoping started to move China towards capitalism – a move continued in the 1990s under Jiang Zemin. Although this has led to an explosion of private business and rapid industrialisation, the CCP still rule a police state with few freedoms, especially for workers.

China is the second largest economy in the world (after the US). According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, China's per capita GDP grew by 2.9% a year. It has accelerated ever since. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 4.8% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 6.4% a year.

Urbanisation is 32%. Shanghai is the world's 8th largest city with nearly 13 million people, and Beijing, Tianjin and Hong Kong are among the world's thirty largest cities.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 317 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 88% (280 million); industry 5% (15 million); and services 7% (22 million).

In 1980, there were 548 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 74% (407 million); industry 14% (77 million); and services 12% (64 million). In manufacturing industry there were 57 million workers.

By 2000, there were 763 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 50% (382 million); industry 23% (175 million); and services 27% (206 million).

Anti-union laws

As part of its system of rule, the All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU) was established as part of the CCP police state. The official “unions” are financed by a payroll tax: 2% of the total wage fund of the enterprise, plus 0.5% of each members pay is transferred to unions by employers. The ACFTU claims a membership of 103 million workers. It claims 90% of workers in the state-owned enterprises are unionised, 31% of foreign-owned firms and 12% of private domestically owned firms. There are no legal trade unions outside the ACFTU.

The 1992 Trade Union Law says: “Trade unions shall mobilise and educate the workers and staff members... to safeguard the property of the state and the enterprise and to observe labour discipline... Trade unions shall organise the workers and staff members in launching socialist labour emulation drives, encouraging mass rationalisation proposals, and promoting technological innovations...”

The law was revised in October 2001, but the ACFTU remains the only legally sanctioned federation. The 1982 Constitution withdrew the nominal right to strike provided by the 1975 Constitution. Disputes are subject to compulsory arbitration.

Recent struggles

Savage repression has not stopped the movement for working class representation. There were great class struggles during the Maoist period but capitalism has brought further waves of struggle.

The independent labour movement first took off during the pro-democracy movement in 1989. The Workers' Autonomous Federations (WAFs) were formed by workers and students in cities at the height of the mass street demonstrations and

signified the first nationwide attempt by workers to organize an independent body to articulate their political and social aspirations. The army crushed the WAFs in the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

The Free Trade Unions of China in Beijing (1991), the League for the Protection of the Rights of Working Peoples in Beijing (1994) and the Hired-Hands Workers' Federation in Shenzhen (1994) represented the second wave of the independent labour movement. These organisations only existed for a short time because like the organisation in 1989, the leaders were imprisoned. These pioneering efforts were limited because they didn't base their organisations in workplaces.

Wang Wanxing, Wang Miaogen and Yao Guisheng, leaders of the WAFs have been incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals for a decade. Cao Maobing, who tried to organise an independent union in 2000 was also forcibly committed to a psychiatric hospital.

But the workers' struggles didn't stop - the number of disputes skyrocketed between 1992 and 1999. Official statistics showed 14 times more labour disputes during the 1990s, from simple contractual disagreements to work stoppages and strikes. Collective disputes also increased rapidly, involving 250,000 workers in 1998, but made up a minority of the total. Besides unrest over wages, disputes involved unpaid pensions to laid-off employees, poor working conditions and the fraudulent sell-off of state enterprises.

A new wave of the independent labour movement began in 2002. Over 80,000 workers in northeastern China organized a fight back in state-owned enterprises. Fifty thousand oilfield workers from Daqing and another 30,000 workers from the metal and other industries in Liaoyang launched street protests, road blockades, pickets, sit-ins and negotiations for over three months. This outbreak marked a watershed; these protests were economically driven, organised at workplace level and worker-led.

The most critical breakthrough was the formation of the Daqing Provisional Union of Retrenched Workers. Unlike earlier efforts, the Daqing union membership is plant-based. There have been reports that preparation for this independent union took place before the protests.

Another development is the new unions in the Kong Tai factory Guangdong and Fu Luh factory in Fujian. In both factories in the last year, workers have voted for their own representatives for the first time. Reebok, anxious to improve its public image, initiated the elections. The multinational persuaded management in the factories and the ACFTU to allow the experiment.

Hong Kong

Just before Hong Kong reverted to Chinese rule in 1997, there were three union federations, representing 22% of workers. The HKTUC was allied to the (Taiwanese) Chinese Federation of Labour, but declined to 28,000 members by 1998. The HKFTU was allied to the AFCTU and claimed 200,000 members. The HKCTU also emerged in 1990, becoming the main focus of independent unionism, claiming 145,000 members.

At the beginning of this year the Hong Kong government announced plans to introduce a new 'anti-subversion law'. This law, if enacted, will stop workers in Hong Kong from coming together as trade unionists to campaign for their existing rights, or improved rights, or even to campaign for the rights of workers on the mainland. If the laws are passed it will set back the growing struggle for workers' rights and free trade unions in mainland China.

India

Political economy

India gained independence in 1947 after two centuries of British colonial rule. Partition at the same time created the state of Pakistan, with which India has fought three wars, two over the disputed territory of Kashmir. Until the early 1990s, economic policy focused on a drive for self-sufficiency with a minimum of foreign participation. Neo-liberal reforms have proceeded slowly—a large public sector co-exists with a sizeable private sector. Agriculture is almost entirely in private hands.

India has had democratic rule since independence, with the Indian National Congress in power for most of the first fifty years. Since 1996 the Hindu nationalist BJP has been the largest party, ruling through coalitions.

India is the fourth largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, India's per capita GDP grew by 1.4% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 2.6% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 3.7% a year.

Urbanisation is 28%. Mumbai is the joint-second largest city in the world with over 18 million people; Kolkata is =8th with nearly 13 million and Delhi the 13th largest with just under 12 million.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 169 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 80% (135 million); industry 8% (14 million); and services 12% (21 million).

In 1980, there were 300 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 70% (209 million); industry 13% (39 million); and services 17% (52 million). In manufacturing industry there were 32 million workers.

By 2000, there were 442 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 60% (265 million); industry 18% (80 million); and services 22% (97 million).

Unions

There is no dominant trade union centre in India. Total membership is estimated at 13-15 million, less than 4% density – although with the formal sector estimated at 30 million workers, the proportion is much higher. Unions are concentrated in key sectors such as railways, telecommunications, airlines and banks.

The INTUC, linked to the Congress Party claimed 6.8 million members (2001), though the BMS, linked to the BJP has become an important rival force. The third largest centre is the HMS, claiming five million members. The HMS is close to the Janata Dal party, and has members on the rail throughout India, transport and dockworkers, Air India, and unions in coal, textiles, steel, engineering, chemicals and electricity. There is also the AITUC, closely linked to the Communist Party of India, and the CITU, which claims 2.8 million members, linked to the Left Front in West Bengal.

A decisive defeat for the Indian working class took place with the textile strike in Bombay in 1982-83. The strike lasted for a year and a half, and involved nearly 200,000 workers, but the strike was ultimately defeated. It marked the beginning of a new period – for the first time since the 1950s, unionisation no longer covered the key sectors of the Bombay economy.

Anti-union laws

The Essential Services Maintenance Act enables the government to ban strikes and demand arbitration in “essential” industries – although it does not define which industries are essential. The Trade Unions (Amendment) Bill, passed in 2001 requires a union to represent at least 100 workers. Under the Industrial Disputes Act firms with less than 1000 workers will be able to lay-off workers or close without the approval of the government. This was previously possible only for firms with under 100 workers.

Recent struggles

When the Congress government signed up to the GATT agreement in 1994, a general strike took place in September. Unions claimed 25 million took part, with a complete shutdown in banking and insurance, and 85% of miners. In December 1998 an even bigger one-day national strike took place in opposition to the BJP’s plans for privatisation.

When the BJP was re-elected again in 1999 there were strikes, including by power workers in Uttar Pradesh and dockers across India. In the power strike, 4,000 of the 90,000 strikers were sacked and the main leaders jailed.

In 2001, 100,000 teachers went on strike over pay and transport allowances in Gujarat state. When bus drivers in Andhra Pradesh state went on strike, they were replaced with scabs. Workers in an aluminium factory came out for a 67-day strike. Fifteen million workers in Maharashtra state – 90% of the working population, including factory workers, restaurants, agricultural workers and taxi drivers came out on strike. The workers were opposing state and federal government austerity and privatisation plans.

In March 2002, half a million government workers and teachers struck for a month in Kerala over plans to worsen conditions such as pensions, retirement, redeployment and school closures. In April, nearly 10 million workers in state-run companies staged a one-day strike in protest at government “reforms”. Factories, banks and ports were heavily affected. The government is pushing ahead with privatisation plans, and wants to make it easier for firms to sack workers. In November a transport strike over privatisation stopped most buses from running in Kerala.

Brazil

Political economy

Brazil was ruled by the Vargas military dictatorship between 1930 and 1945, and was under military rule from 1964 until 1985. Between 1994 and 2002 the Brazilian Social Democratic Party ruled, led by Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Lula da Silva of the Workers' Party became president in 2003.

Brazil suffered from the collapse in world coffee prices during the great depression, adopting a conscious industrialisation strategy in the 1930s. Vargas introduced public works, subsidies and tariffs to support fledgling industries. Between 1949 and 1961 total industrial production, including mining, construction and electricity nearly tripled. By 1962 Brazil was capable of producing a full range of car parts and components.

After the coup in 1964, a new industrialisation strategy emerged. The state attracted foreign and domestic investors into industry, supporting their investments with tariffs, subsidies, and state enterprise production. At the same time, by extending credit to upper and middle class consumers, the state tried to create a market for a growing consumer durables sector.

Brazil is now the ninth largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Brazil's per capita GDP grew by 3.7% a year. Between 1973 and 1980, it grew by 4.3% a year but from 1980 to 1990 shrank by 0.5% a year. From 1990 to 1999 per capita GDP grew by 1.1% a year.

Urbanisation is over 81%. In 1970, over 56% of Brazilians lived in urban areas, up from 36% in 1950. Sao Paulo is the fourth largest city in the world with nearly 18 million people and Rio is in the top thirty largest cities with over 10 million inhabitants.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 19 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 61% (12 million); industry 16% (3 million); and services 23% (4 million).

In 1980, there were 48 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 37% (17 million); industry 24% (11 million); and services 39% (19 million). In manufacturing industry there were 8 million workers.

By 2000, there were 79 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 26% (21 million); industry 23% (18 million); and services 51% (40 million).

In the Sao Paulo ABCD region, the number of factories increased from 741 in 1950 to 3,394 in 1978. The average factory size grew from 62 workers per factory in 1950 to 84 in 1978. The average size of factories in all non-extractive industries more than doubled between 1960 and 1980, from 16 workers to 39 workers.

Unions

Before 1980 unions were organised along corporatist lines, with unions incorporated in the state and strikes banned. Conservative unionists are known as *pelegos* – the blanket that sits between the horse and the saddle.

This changed dramatically after the great workers' strikes that began in 1978. The strike wave began when a hundred workers at the Saab-Scania plant demanded a 20% wage increase. By the end of the year, about 540,000 workers, including teachers, bank workers, textile workers as well as 350,000 metalworkers had taken strike action.

The leadership of this movement was diffuse. Some of the metalworkers involved were part of clandestine networks. There were Catholic workers' groups, Communist Party activists and the Metalworkers Union Opposition, which had been around since the late 1960s.

The metalworkers struck again in 1979, provoked a strike wave across Brazil. More than three million workers – about 13% of the industrial labour force – went on strike, mainly for higher wages. Auto and metal workers dominated the 1978 and 1979 strike waves, accounting for nearly half of all strikes from 1978 to 1986. Between 1978 and 1984, they accounted for 70% of strikes. Of these, 40% were in the Sao Paulo area.

A general strike of three million workers was organised in 1983. In terms of strikes, the numbers rose from under 200 in 1982 to over a thousand in 1986. In 1985 nearly 90 million days were lost. Some estimates have union membership quadrupling – from 2.7 million before the 1978-79 strike wave to over 12 million in 1983.

In 1981 the first National Conference of the Working Class – CONCLAT - was held to create a national organisation. Over 5,000 delegates from more than 1,100 unions met to discuss the way ahead. Two tendencies were evident – firstly the new unionism, which represented a break with the old-style unionism, and what was known as 'Unidad Sindical' that did not. The new unionists would go on to form the Central Unica dos Trabalhadores (CUT) in 1983.

The CUT strategy was to seize the official unions from the inside in order to transform them. This worked successfully in the 1980s, and the CUT grew rapidly. The new unionism also emphasised organisation in the workplace. Factory commissions often arose as ad hoc groups from workers' meetings to negotiate and bargain at plant level. In 1991 there were at least fifty factory commissions among the metalworkers of Sao Bernardo do Campo alone.

Between 1983 and 1991, there were six general strikes. The first, in July 1983 (the first since the early 1960s), involved three million workers in protest against the government's economic policies, the high cost of living etc. In December 1986 around 10 million workers came out against the second Cruzado plan. Another strike in August 1987 was considered a failure. However in March 1989 perhaps 25 million workers struck against yet another austerity package – the largest general strike in Brazilian history. Two further strikes took place against the Collor government, in June 1990 and May 1991.

According to the ICFTU the CUT currently has over 4.5 million members – roughly one-third in manufacturing, one-third public sector and one-third farm workers. Within the CUT in the early 1990s there were two broad tendencies: the 'CUT pela Base' that advocated mobilisation of the rank and file, and 'Articulacao' that advocated participation in tripartite institutions.

In 1986, conservative and communist-led unions formed the CGT. According to the ICFTU it currently has over 2.2 million members. Nationally, it is the only recognised union. In 1991 another centre, Forca Sindical (FS) was set up by a former leader of the CGT. Its slogan is "trade unionism that gets results", meaning support for Cardoso. According to the ICFTU it has over 2.1 million members. Two-thirds of its members are in manufacturing industry – including metalworking – as well as the food industry and the service sector. It is concentrated in the Sao Paulo area.

Currently union density is about 14%, and concentrated in the Sao Paulo ABC industrial zone and in the public sector.

Anti-union laws

The anti-union laws laid down by Vargas still underpin Brazil's industrial relations system. For example the "unicidade" system stipulates that there can be only one trade union per economic or occupational category in each territorial area. Also, unions are funded by the "imposto sindical" (union tax), a compulsory levy equivalent to a day's pay, and paid to the Ministry of Labour.

After the military were forced to allow civilian rule, some legal space for independent unions has been allowed. The 1988 constitution provided for all workers to form autonomous trade unions and to strike. Although Cardoso tried and failed to overhaul the system, it is likely that Lula will reform the anti-union laws.

Recent struggles

The level of trade union struggle has fallen significantly since this 1991. In May 1995 the Oil Industry Workers' Union, affiliated to the CUT, launched a general strike after the government refused to pay a wage increase agreed the year before with the previous government. The strike lasted 30 days, and was broken when the courts declared the strike illegal and the army took over the refineries. A hundred workers, including union leaders were sacked.

The CUT planned a general strike in March (2002) against Cardoso's plans for new anti-union laws, including restricting the right of civil servants to strike. In September 2001 400,000 civil servants went on strike over pay. When teachers had earlier been on strike for three months, the government tried to introduce the same law – known as the "Provisional Measure". Union leaders have been assassinated, shot at and threatened over the last year.

Although there is a strong historic relationship between the CUT and the Workers' Party, Lula has proposed a social pact, including a wage freeze, which has been rejected by Joao Felicio, head of the CUT. The CUT describes its relationship to the new government as one of "conditional support".

Mexico

Political economy

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ruled Mexico from 1929 until 2000. From the beginning, the party created a network of social control and patronage, using unions as an essential base of the regime. After 1982 the PRI pursued neo-liberal economics, privatising all but a hundred of the one thousand state companies. Many Mexicans hoped that the election of neo-conservative Vicente Fox in 2000 would open a new era, but Fox has been a great disappointment.

Mexico is the 11th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Mexico's per capita GDP grew by 3.2% a year. Between 1973 and 1980, it grew by 3.8% a year but from 1980 to 1990 shrank by 0.3% a year. From

1990 to 1999 per capita GDP grew by 1.2% a year. Urbanisation is almost 75%. Mexico City is the joint-second largest city in the world, with over 18 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1910 there were less than one million workers outside agriculture, representing 16% of the labour force.

In 1950 there were 9 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 60% (5.5 million); industry 17% (1.5 million); and services 23% (2 million).

In 1980, there were 22 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 36% (8 million); industry 29% (6.5 million); and services 35% (7.5 million). In manufacturing industry there were 3.5 million workers.

By 2000, there were 41 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 23% (9.5 million); industry 23% (9.5 million); and services 54% (22 million).

Unions

The dominant force since the 1930s has been the CTM, led for six decades by Fidel Velasquez. Another important federation is the CROC, founded in the 1920s, and the public sector FSTSE, with 1.8 million members. An umbrella organisation, the CT, was founded in 1966. The CTM claims 5 million members, but declined during the 1990s – the ICFTU estimates it now has 1.5 million members.

However there are also important shoots of independent trade union activity. The Authentic Labor Front (FAT), which had its origins in catholic unionism in the early 1960s, has been at the forefront of organising in the maquiladora export factories. There is also a powerful rank and file grouping in teachers union SNTE, called the CNTE.

In 1997, 100 unions, representing one million workers announced they would unite in a new organisation, the UNT. It now has over 200 unions affiliated and 1.5 million members, including telephone union STRM, social security union SNTSS, university union STUNAM and the VW workers in Puebla.

Anti-union laws

Mexico's labour law dates from the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920. Under the 1917 Constitution, Article 123 gave workers the right to union organization, the right to strike, collective bargaining, and protective legislation. It was probably the most advanced labour law in the world at the time of its adoption.

However, as the revolution subsided, the Mexican state grew in power, claiming the right to act as supreme arbiter in labour matters. In 1931, the Federal Labour Law created tripartite labour boards (Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration) that brought together government officials, the pro-government unions, and the employers. Government officials, corrupt union bureaucrats, and bosses created a closed system in which workers had little freedom.

Fox presented a proposal for labour law reform to the Mexican legislature in December 2002 that will strengthen the power of employers and the old, corrupt labour federations, while denying workers fundamental rights of free association, the right to strike, and genuine collective bargaining.

The government's proposal will largely keep in place the existing set of government agencies that over see labour relations and maintains their power to control unions and workers. It reinforces the mechanisms that have led to corrupt practices by gangster union officials, shady labour lawyers, government officials on the take, "ghost unions" and "protection" contracts.

The government labor law reform proposal, for example, does not contain the open registry of labour unions and contracts sought by democratic reformers. Nor does it give rank-and-file workers the right to vote by secret ballot elections for their own union officials. The new proposal gives the government and the employers more control over the workers' right to strike, the right to change unions (that is for workers trapped in corrupt unions to establish or move to independent unions), and the right to engage in genuine collective bargaining.

Recent struggles

Workers have continued to fight back in spite of the difficult conditions, although Fox has behaved just like the PRI. For example, when the Duro Bag workers asked the government to oversee free union elections in 2001, Fox refused to intervene. The company sacked the workers, and gangsters beat them up, and so not surprisingly, the old, corrupt union won the election.

At Euzkadi Tyres, the employer threatened to close the factory unless workers accepted changes in the collective bargaining agreement, the Fox administration came down on the side of the tyre company. In another case, the Celanese Corporation, a multinational textile company, sacked 425 workers, and then rehired them, imposing an inferior collective bargaining agreement, but government labour authorities ignored the matter.

The high point over the last year has been the victory at Kukdong, now called Mexmode. Workers have not only won recognition of their own union (SITEMEX), but also negotiated improvements in conditions. They did so in the teeth of repression by factory bosses and threats from Nike – but, backed by international solidarity, these workers have showed what can be done.

Workers occupied maquiladoras abandoned by their employers to recoup lost wages, and peasants protested against abuse in Baja California. The Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) has continued its struggle against the privatisation of the electrical industry. Doctors and other public health care workers struck over their own low wages and poor working conditions and the lack of services and supplies for their patients.

For over three months last year, teachers carried out a sit-in at their congress to protest cuts in the nation's education budget. Mexico is next to last among Latin American nations in the percentage of funds it dedicates to education.

In Texcoco, site of the proposed new Mexico City airport, thousands carrying torches and wielding machetes marched in protest – curtailing the plans. The university workers' unions around the country have threatened to strike for higher wages, and for a larger budget for higher education.

In August 2000 workers at the giant Volkswagen plant near Puebla, which makes the VW Beetle, went on strike after pay negotiations broke down. The plant employs 20,000 workers, many of whom are members of the independent union SITIAVW.

In Michoacán, workers of the Miners and Metal Workers Union at the SICARTSA steel mill occupied the factory for weeks over local issues, but also because of a conflict with the new general secretary, imposed on them by the Fox government.

Between January and June of 2002 there were 31 strikes at Federal level compared to 35 last year, according to the Workers University of Mexico. There has also been a surge in worker complaints to government authorities, with over 300,000 such grievances filed in the last 18 months.

Working class political representation

The Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT) contested elections from the early 1980s. Its candidate Rosario Ibarra stood in 1982 and 1988, gaining 5% despite electoral fraud by the PRI. No workers' candidates stood in 1994 – most of the left supported the bourgeois-nationalist PRD candidate Cardenas.

Manuel Aguilar Mora, a former leader of the PRT stood in 2000. There was a proposal to create a "Party of Workers" in the UNT in 2000, but nothing came of it.

South Korea

Political economy

South Korea was established as an independent state in 1948, after decades of Japanese rule. In 1961 the military staged a coup and organised the industrialisation of the country under the wing of US and Japanese government and business. The chaebol (conglomerates), including Daewoo, Samsung and Hyundai dominate the economy – their combined sales equal half national output, and are among the top 200 firms globally. The military only relinquished power in the face of a pro-democracy movement in 1987.

After a wave of strikes and over two million people demonstrating in 34 cities, the first free presidential elections were held in 1987 – and won by the ruling party candidate Roh Tae Woo. However both opposition candidates, Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae-jung both later became president. Kim Dae-jung of the Millennium Democratic Party (MDP) was president from 1997 until 2002. The new president, also from the MDP, is Roh Moo-hyun.

South Korea is the 13th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, South Korea's per capita GDP grew by 5.8% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 6.8% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 4.8% a year. South Korea had the fastest growing GDP per person in the world over the past fifty years. Urbanisation is now 81% and Seoul is the world's 20th largest city with almost 10 million inhabitants.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 7.5 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 77% (5.7 million); industry 6% (0.5 million); and services 17% (1.2 million).

In 1980, there were 15.5 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 37% (5.8 million); industry 27% (4.1 million); and services 36% (5.6 million). In manufacturing industry there were 3.2 million workers.

By 2000, there were 24 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 11% (2.6 million); industry 31% (7.4 million); and services 58% (14 million).

Unions

After the military coup in 1961, all labour organisations were dissolved and replaced by the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU), often called the “yellow dog” union because of its ties to the government.

A group of workers who had been victimised for militant activity formed the Workers’ Welfare Association (WWA) in 1984. They came together with the aim of rebuilding the labour movement, seeing themselves as continuing a tradition stretching back to the 1940s. The WWA took part in the United Minjung [Peoples] Movement for Democracy and Unification (UMDU). There were also two student groups, Jiamintu and Minmintu, which turned to the working class during this period.

The 1985 strike at Daewoo Motors, involving over 2,000 workers, represented the first significant breakthrough. It was the first major strike against a chaebol, it was the first time since 1971 that male workers had gone on the offensive; and it was the first time that workers had struck independently of the wishes of the official company union. A month later, after workers at the Daewoo Apparel Textile Company began a sit-in strike, one thousand workers from nine other factories came out in solidarity. WWA, UMDU and the student groups were involved in both these struggles.

Within the first six months of 1985, there were 146 disputes, twice the number in 1984. By 1987 the number of disputes rocketed. As well as in chaebol factories, strikes also took place in health, finance, research, transport and tourism. It what became known as the “Great Workers’ Struggle”, there were 3,749 officially recorded disputes in 1987 – over 3,000 of them in July and August alone. All these strikes were illegal, and thousands were arrested or beaten by company thugs called kusadae.

Membership of the FKTU reached 1.9 million members, (nearly 20% density) although it was still tied to the state. However regional labour federations began to organise a democratic union movement after another wave of strikes in 1988. Although the number of strikes fell from 1987 to 1989, with 1,873 days in 1988 and 1,616 days in 1989, the average duration of strikes increased. In 1987 it was just over 5 days, in 1988 it was 13 days and by 1989 it was 18 days on average. New unions - for example in teaching - were formed, even though organising in education was illegal. In 1988, eight regional labour federations formed the National Council of Labour Movement Organisations (NCLMO). In 1990, the NCLMO created a more permanent organisation, when the Korean Trade Union Congress (KTUC) was formed, with 200,000 members.

Independent unions were severely repressed, but continued to develop. In 1989 combat police were used to break a strike of 5,000 subway workers in Seoul and a 109-day strike at the Hyundai shipyard in Ulsan. In 1990, 10,000 police were used at the same shipyard, and riot police attacked strikers at the Korean Broadcasting System. In the early 1990s Korea had the highest number of trade unionists in prison in the world.

In 1995 the KTUC became the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). In December 1996-January 1997 the KCTU led massive strikes against government anti-union laws – with 400,000 workers coming out at the height of the strikes.

The FKTU has declined to around one million members during the 1990s. The KCTU was legally recognised in 1999, and has over half a million members. It is strong in car making and shipbuilding, finance, media, nursing, teaching and the public sector. It has discussed forming a “party that fights for the working class”.

KCTU affiliates are: the KMWF (metal industry), KCTF (chemical/textile), KFCITU (construction), KCFLU (clerical/finance), KFPSWU (service/hotel/retail), NUMW (press/media/journalism), KFHU/KHMW (health/medical sector), KTU-Chunkyojo (education/teachers), KUWU (university employees), KPSU (transportation/public sector), KFTWU (taxi drivers), KCWF (freight drivers), NLU university lecturers, KBWU (bus drivers), KFFMWU (utility maintenance) and KFWWU (Korean Federation of Women Workers Unions).

Anti-union laws

Under the Trade Union Law 1980 only one union was allowed in each enterprise, and only enterprise level unions could negotiate with employers. The 1997 Trade Union Relations Adjustment Act bans strikes for anyone working for central or local government. It also restricts the right to strike in “essential” services. Teachers do not have the right to strike, and only

won the right to form unions in 1999. Although unions the FKTU has lost its monopoly at national and industrial level, only one union is allowed at plant level until 2006.

Recent struggles

In 2001 Daewoo workers struck after the company, which was angling for a foreign takeover, sacked over 1,700 militants. Four thousand workers had been sacked over the previous two years. Police attacked the workers on strike as they peacefully demonstrated.

Leaders of the banking union KFIU (part of the FKTU) were imprisoned for “obstruction to business”. Telecom union KTCWU occupied the Mokdong telephone office after workers were sacked. Again the police attacked the workers, and union leaders were imprisoned. Workers at Korea’s largest nylon plant in Ulsan went on strike after union leaders were victimised. Workers are attacked with bulldozers and helicopters.

In June 2001 the KCTU organised a general strike – over 50,000 workers came out. The union organised another strike in July, with 80,000 coming out – raising issues of anti-union repression and the structural adjustment policies of the government.

In April 2002 a general strike in support of striking power plant workers was called off. Power plant workers had been out for 38 days, but the government still said it would proceed with privatisation. In June-July 2002, a 47-day strike took place at Doosan Heavy Industries and Construction.

During the World Cup, 23 trade unionists were arrested and detained, adding to the 30 arrested in the weeks leading up to the competition. The KCTU reported that over 600 union leaders were imprisoned between 1997 and 2001, more than in the previous five years.

In August 2002, at Halla Hospital on the southern island of Cheju, where nurses and technicians had struck for two months to improve the rights of temporary workers, management sacked most of the participants and sent in a private security firms to attack strikers. In October, 5,000 hospital workers in some 150 hospitals throughout the country took to the streets in a solidarity strike.

In November 2002, 120,000 went on strike over the government’s plans for working time changes. Unions have been campaigning for a five-day working week, but the government’s plan to do so involves cutting public holidays, annual leave, menstruation leave and night pay – overall imposing a wage cut. The government announced it would delay the legislation, pending the election result. Also in November, 30,000 civil servants took two days of strike for union recognition and the right to strike.

Working class political representation

Kwon Young-ghil, stood for the presidency as the leader of Democratic Labour Party (DLP). He was the first president of the KCTU. He got over 300,000 votes (1.2%) in the presidential elections in 1997, and in 2000 the DLP got 8.1% in local elections. Kwon campaigned in the 2002 presidential elections, criticising Kim Dae-jung’s neo-liberal policies and calling for taxing the rich. He describes the DLP as the “party of the progressives” and “a party of hope for all working people”. Kwon got just under 4% - almost a million votes. In the industrial city of Ulsan, Kwon received 11.4% of the vote.

Indonesia

Political economy

Indonesia declared independence from the Dutch in 1945, finally achieving it in 1949 under the leadership of Sukarno. From 1965 until 1998 the dictator Suharto ruled a virtual police state – his Golkar party dominating politics. He resigned in the face of widespread popular opposition in 1998. The President is currently Megawati Sukarnoputri, daughter of the first president, Sukarno.

Under Suharto, Indonesia’s economy was reconstituted on the basis of import-substitution industrialisation, producing light consumer goods. In the wake of the oil-boom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the strategy shifted to higher technology and more capital-intensive projects involving steel, petrochemicals, cement, paper and automobiles. From the mid-1980s, the government shifted to an export-led strategy underpinned by low wages and low technology – garments, textiles and footwear.

The state acted as a catalyst to the development of a new domestic bourgeoisie, whose formation was inextricably linked to state protection in the form of provision of monopolies, credit and subsidies. Suharto's family were heavily involved in joint ventures with multinationals.

Indonesia is the 15th largest economy in the world. Between 1950 and 1973, Indonesia's per capita GDP grew by 2.6% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 3.1% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 2.1% a year. Urbanisation is 40%. Jakarta is the =14th largest city in the world, with 11 million people. The urban population of Java grew from 23 million to 38 million during the 1980s.

The working class

In the 1950s, the modern industrial proletariat in manufacturing numbered barely 500,000 workers.

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 32 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 79% (25 million); industry 6% (2 million); and services 15% (5 million).

In 1980, there were 60 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 58% (35 million); industry 12% (7 million); and services 30% (18 million). In manufacturing industry there were 5.3 million workers.

By 2000, there were 103 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 43% (44 million); industry 17% (18 million); and services 40% (41 million).

In 1991, three million workers were employed in 16,000 factories classified as medium and large-scale.

Unions

Suharto's seizure of power in 1965 and the subsequent massacre of the communists (PKI) also wiped out the independent labour movement. In 1973 the government formed the FBSI as the central union body - the initial meetings were held in the office of the state intelligence agency - indicating its police-state character.

In 1985 it became the SPSI, the sole legally registered union centre - claiming around 900,000 members. Fourteen of the seventeen members of its board were Golkar members. The other state-run unions were the KORPRI for civil servants and the PGRI teachers union, with 1.3 million members.

A measure of the extent of repression is the strike figures. One estimate puts the number of strikes between 1971 and 1975 at five; between 1976 and 1980 this rose to 66; and between 1981 and 1985 this had risen to 112 strikes. However between 1986 and 1990 the number of strikes fell to just 46 cases.

Anti-union laws

Although some of the anti-union laws of the Suharto period were lifted after 1998, restrictions remain. Under the Trade Union Act (2000) unions have to register with the Manpower Ministry. Courts can still dissolve a union if its basis conflicts with the 1945 Constitution or with Pancasila, the ideology of Sukarno. Strikes are forbidden in the civil service, and there is no right to strike enshrined in law.

In 2002 the government tried to introduce new anti-union laws. It proposed more sub-contracting, oral contracts and a "training wage" 80% of the minimum wage. Sackings would no longer require the approval of the labour ministry. Employers would be able to withhold paying wages during strikes and negotiations. Political and solidarity strikes - any not related to direct pay and conditions - would be banned. Only the majority union would be recognised and strikers tried in court face a massive fine or four years in prison.

In response unions have demonstrated, successfully delaying the laws. In August in Bandung 30,000 workers went on strike in 600 factories. An SBSI organiser was hospitalised with bullet wounds. On September 19th "one of the largest labour protests ever" took place in Jakarta, according to local newspapers.

Recent struggles

There was a large upsurge in strikes from the early 1990s that helped to undermine the legitimacy of the Suharto regime. In one case, a strike at PT Gadjah Tunggal in August 1991 involved 14,000 workers at 14 different companies producing rubber tyres for cars and bikes.

In 1990 there were 61 strikes - three times more than the previous year. In 1991 the figure went up to 130, and by 1992 reached 251. After a slight fall in 1993 to 185 strikes, the next three years saw much more strike action: 296 in 1994, 276 in 1995 and 346 in 1996. The last year where figures are available (1997), there were 234 strikes.

Political NGOs played a vital role in this upsurge. Because they were not constrained by tight regulations on the establishment of unions, they were able to by-pass the mechanisms of state control by carrying out community-orientated activities. Many of its activists were former factory workers dismissed for participating in previous strike action and for that reason held in high esteem by their colleagues.

And the organising that took place was largely concentrated in female-dominated, low-skill, labour-intensive industries that were central to the success of the government's export-led industrialisation strategy. But activists often had to visit workers at home to avoid repression and sackings.

The first organisation was the SBM Setiakawan – the Solidarity Free Trade Union, formed in 1990, led by H.J. Princen. The Indonesian Prosperity Labour Union SBSI federation led by Muchtar Pakpahan, was founded in 1992. Pakpahan is a Christian social democrat who uses the experiences of European trade unions as a model.

Another significant independent trade union federation, founded in 1994, was the Centre for Indonesian Labour Struggle (PPBI), including Dita Sari. In July 1995, the PPBI took part in organising a highly publicised strike in Bogor and demonstrations by workers at PT Great River Industries, the brand-name garment producer.

Although its leaders faced frequent arrest and imprisonment, these workers struggles played a vital role in bringing down Suharto. It also allowed them to form independent unions under the new regime.

The SBSI now claims a million members – but it probably has around 300,000. It has members in manufacturing, transport, banking and textiles. In 1999 the PPBI became the National Front for Indonesian Labour Struggle, (FNPBI). It started with 6 affiliated unions, growing to 20 by 2000. The FNPBI organised 50,000 workers for a May Day demonstration in 2001. In November 2001 strikers were attacked and injured and nine FNPBI leaders arrested at the Matahari Putra Prima department store. There are now 40 different trade union centres, including Muslim unions and various factions of the old state-run unions.

As well as the struggle against the new anti-union laws, there are other ongoing fights. The long-running Shangri-La hotel dispute continued. Workers went on strike in December 2000 when their union president was victimised. Nearly 600 workers were then sacked for refusing to leave the union, the SPMS. Workers organised a picket line, which was attacked by the hotel owners' "bodyguards". The hotel reopened in March 2001 with a non-union workforce. Police attacked workers when they demonstrated outside. In May 2001 the government's labour disputes committee ruled in favour of management.

Two workers were killed at the PT Kadera car upholstery factory during an occupation in 2001. Four hundred workers organised a strike and sit-in after being paid less than the minimum wage. They were attacked at night by 400 hired thugs.

The Jakarta Post reported in November (2002) that thousands of workers had lost their jobs and received no payment after eight mainly Korean textile factories abruptly closed in the first half of the year - including 500 workers at PT Kawan Kita Sejahtera who lost their jobs and received no severance pay. In September 7,000 workers locked out of PT Doson, which subcontracts for Nike. In October, another 500 workers at PT Hyungsung held their boss hostage when workers were not paid their full severance pay when the factory closed.

Argentina

Political economy

A century ago Argentina was richer than France. In 1914 Argentina attracted 10% of Britain's total investment abroad, was the world's second largest exporter of wheat, the world's largest corn and linseed producer, second largest wool exporter and third largest exporter of cattle.

However with the contraction of trade brought about first by the First World War and then by the great depression, it undertook a strategy of import substitution industrialisation. Between 1945 and 1954, Juan Peron ruled Argentina, developing this policy – famously nationalising the British-owned railway. Peron also presided over the growth and incorporation of the unions into his populist Justicialist party.

From 1955 to 1983 the military dominated politics, including the bloody period 1976-82. During that period, Argentina underwent more capital-intensive industrialisation, producing its own cars, gas, oil and petroleum and running its own telephone system and national airline.

During the 1990s, the Peronist Carlos Menem pursued a neo-liberal policy, summed up as “major surgery without anaesthetic” included privatisation, austerity and cuts in public spending. In 1990 Menem restricted the right to strike in “essential industries” – public health, transport, water supply, gas, oil, phones and education.

Since 1999 the Argentine economy has been in recession, and the political system has lost its legitimacy following the collapse of its currency board in 2001.

Argentina is the 18th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Argentina’s per capita GDP grew by 2.1% a year. Between 1973 and 1980, it grew by 0.5% a year but from 1980 to 1990 shrank by 2.3% a year. From 1990 to 1999 per capita GDP grew by 3.4% a year.

Argentina is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with 89% living in towns and cities. Buenos Aires is the tenth largest conurbation in the world, with nearly 13 million people.

The working class

Factory employment in Argentina totalled 340,000 in 1925, accounting for 8.3% of economically active population. By 1930 there were half a million workers in manufacturing.

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 7 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 25% (1.8 million); industry 32% (2.3 million); and services 43% (3.1 million).

In 1980, there were 11 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 13% (1.4 million); industry 34% (3.6 million); and services 53% (5.7 million). In manufacturing industry there were 2.3 million workers.

By 2000, there were 15 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 8% (1.2 million); industry 20% (3 million); and services 72% (10.8 million).

Unions

Forty per cent of the workforce is unionised. The main unions are the CGT, the CGT-M and the CTA. The CGT is the oldest federation, formed in 1930. After 1943 it became a satellite of the Peronist movement, and under the leadership of Rodolfo Daer remains so today. According to the ICFTU, it had 4.4 million members in 2000.

In 2000 a split occurred, when the “combative” unions led by Hugo Moyano split, to form the CGT-M. The CTA was formed in the mid-1990s during protests against Menem’s anti-union policies.

Anti-union laws

In 1996 Menem proposed new anti-union laws to restrict collective bargaining and introduce individual contracts. General strikes in September and December 1996 blocked the proposals.

Although the constitution provides the right to form free trade unions, this is restricted by the stipulation that only one union per industrial sector and within a given geographical area is allowed to negotiate salaries, collect dues and call strikes.

Recent struggles

The unemployed workers’ movement – known as *piqueteros* (picketers), began in 1996 in the interior as a protest against job cuts and plant shutdowns. In August 2001 unemployed workers’ organisations, numbering over 100,000 people shut down 300 highways.

In early September 2001, two national meetings of unemployed groups took place in Matanza and La Plata. The meetings drew over 2,000 delegates from dozens of unemployed, trade union, student, cultural, and NGO groups. This was followed by massive highway blockades in the capital, Buenos Aires, and a successful general strike in association with sectors of the trade unions, blocking government activity and the entrances of all the major private industries. Picketers’ Assembly, took place in June 2002.

There are about 150 workplaces under occupation in Argentina - some of them managed as co-operatives. The most significant is the Zanon ceramics factory in Neuquén. Workers took over the factory on October 1st 2001 after the management attempted to sack nearly 50% of the workforce. Four months later workers re-established production. The Zanon workers have faced several attempts to evict them, which they have successfully prevented.

The workers at Brukman have occupied this textile manufacturer in Buenos Aires since December 2001. For over a year production has been organised under workers’ control. Brukman was stormed by police in November - but successfully

reoccupied. The Junin Clinic is in the city of Cordoba. It involves 35 workers. It was occupied in May 2002 and set to work offering health-care services to community since June. At Rio Turbio 1100 miners have forced the local state to take over the mine.

South Africa

Political economy

South Africa was ruled by the National Party from 1948 until 1994, which created the racist system of apartheid to ensure white minority rule. Workers and independent unions played a vital role in ending apartheid. The African National Congress (ANC), led by Nelson Mandela, won the first non-racial elections in 1994. The current president is Thabo Mbeki of the ANC.

From the late 1920s onwards, the South African government promoted the expansion of industry for the domestic market. Protective tariffs were designed to encourage light manufacturing, especially in textiles, paper, wood products, food and beverages. After World War II, when South African firms began to move into heavier industry, state-owned companies such as the Iron and Steel Corporation played a major role.

In the post war period, the South African state constructed a transport network, using public works programmes to employ and train poor whites. It raised protective tariff walls, blocking industrial imports from competing with domestically produced goods. Para-statal corporations provided the basic inputs required for industrial expansion and state policies created a highly stratified market.

By the late 1950s, after an initial import-substitution phase, in which manufacture was assisted through tariff protection, state financing, and parastatal provision of basic inputs, the government would now seek to promote dynamic sectoral expansion through market protection, local-content laws, and tax incentives; state enterprises would provide inputs, foreign capital would bring technology and access to international markets, and domestic capital could participate in joint ventures.

South Africa had by the 1960s been transformed from a primarily extractive and agricultural society into an urbanised industrial one; during the 1960s, the state would undertake policies designed to 'deepen' the industrial base. The most prominent example of how South Africa managed to attract and control foreign capital is the automobile industry, which in the early 1970s accounted for 14% of total manufacturing.

South Africa's path of manufacturing growth led to the emergence of a small and powerful capitalist class linked to foreign interests. This bourgeoisie included elements of financial capital, the mining houses, capitalists in the Afrikaner nationalist movement, the parastatals and foreign companies. In 1977, the three top firms controlled at least 70% of turnover in one-third of industries. Overall, the top 5% of firms controlled 63% of turnover.

South Africa is the 21st largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, South Africa's per capita GDP grew by 2.2% a year. Between 1973 and 1998, it shrank by 0.3% a year. Urbanisation is 55%.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 5.6 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 38% (2.1 million); industry 26% (1.5 million); and services 35% (2 million).

By the mid 1970s, the basic assumptions on which apartheid rested – that blacks were unskilled workers, temporarily residing in urban industrial areas while their families remained in rural Bantustans – was completely overtaken by South Africa's industrialisation. In manufacturing as a whole, black workers had replaced white. By 1977 blacks made up over 91% of semi-skilled and 40% of skilled workers. By 1970, 33% of Africans lived in cities, up from 23% in 1946.

There was also a high degree of industrial concentration around Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Nearly half of manufacturing employment in 1965 was around the PWV area around Johannesburg.

In 1980, there were 10.7 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 17% (1.9 million); industry 35% (3.7 million); and services 48% (5.2 million). In manufacturing industry there were 1.9 million workers.

By 2000, there were 18 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 9% (1.6 million); industry 25% (4.5 million); and services 66% (11.9 million).

Unions

For most of the 1960s, strikes were virtually unheard of. However by the 1970s, the rise of an urban black population with new levels of political organisation threatened both the industrial peace and white domination.

The strike wave began in Durban in January 1973, when a small group of workers from the Coronation Brick and Tile Company demanding a wage rise. Other workers in Durban also came out, as well as in Transvaal and the Eastern Cape, until nearly a hundred thousand workers had taken part.

Between 1974 and 1979, an average of 27,000 workers struck annually – with around 45,000 days lost each year. This contrasts with the period 1966 to 1972, when the annual average number of strikers was averaged below 4,000.

Students played an important role in the strikes, helping to calculate cost of living indexes and researching for workers. The banned trade union federation SACTU also played a role in the 1973 strikes.

In 1973 the number of strikes reached an all-time high of nearly 400. This was reached and surpassed in the early 1980s, with almost 500 strikes in 1984. Around 100,000 strikers were involved in 1973, with almost 150,000 in 1982 and close to 250,000 in 1985. The number of days lost also leapt, from around 200,000 in 1973 and less than 400,000 in 1982, to 1.3 million in 1985.

This strike data is not entirely reliable – it does not include political strikes. For example the 1985 figure for days lost leaves out the effects of a two-day general strike in Johannesburg that involved between 300,000 and 800,000 workers. Nevertheless it does provide an indication of the upsurge in working class struggle during the period.

The strike wave was swiftly transferred into organisational gains. Membership of non-racial and black unions rose from about 200,000 in late 1982 to about one million in 1985 – about 30% of the workforce. And the principle of non-racialism became dominant with the independent labour movement.

The Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) was formed in 1979 by thirteen of the largest, unregistered unions. The new federation was firmly based in the metal and car industries – precisely those industries that had grown most rapidly over the previous two decades, and in which black workers had moved into semi-skilled positions. By the time COATU was formed in 1985, it claimed 795,000 workers in 23 unions with over 12,000 shop stewards.

Between 1979 and early 1986, strikes in the metal and automobile sectors accounted for 30% of person-days lost to industrial action. It is notable that multinational automobile companies were more willing to negotiate with black unions because of pressure from abroad. Ford promised in 1973 that it would recognise any union representing more than 50% of the workforce, and in 1977 to allow black workers to pay union dues, despite white workers objections. In 1981, nearly 11,000 metalworkers struck for union recognition in the Johannesburg area – by 1982 the figure had reached nearly 50,000.

On May 1st 1986 1.5 million workers “stayed away” from work to demand an official May Day holiday – the largest strike in South African history. In 1988 a general strike of 1.3 million workers protested at new anti-union laws. At the time there were serious discussions about creating a workers’ party based on the unions. However in 1990 COSATU joined the “revolutionary alliance” of the ANC and the South African Communist Party. In 1994 leading members of COSATU joined the ANC government.

In 1994 union membership was estimated at 3.5 million – a density of 26%. At the time COSATU had 1.3 million members. The black consciousness NACTU had 500,000 members. By 1998, union membership had declined to 2.9 million. COSATU currently claims 1.8 million members. The largest union is the mineworkers’ NUM, with 290,000 members in mining, energy, engineering and construction. The health, teachers and metalworkers (NUMSA) all have over 200,000 members.

Anti-union laws

The anti-union laws from the apartheid period were dismantled after 1994. The 1995 Labour Relations Act recognises the main trade union rights on paper.

In 2000, the ANC government announced changes to labour laws. They included scrapping overtime pay for Sunday work, extending the working week beyond 45 hours, and allowing employers to sack workers after simply notifying the labour ministry.

Recent struggles

In 1997 more than two million workers took part in a general strike demanding better conditions of employment. The strike was organised by COSATU and the NACTU. An estimated 250,000 also took part in nationwide rallies. In August 1999 thousands of public servants took to the streets to demand better working conditions and higher wages.

In 1999 the ANC government announced it would privatise the four largest state enterprises, in telecom, electricity, defence and transport – employing 77% of public sector workers.

In August 2001 more than three million workers took part in a national strike against the ANC's privatisation programme. The strike was organised by COSATU and the NACTU.

In October 2002 another general strike against privatisation plans for electricity, telephones, water and transport services took place. The unions said half the workforce took part – the government said 10%. The government attacked “ultra-left sectarians” in the unions for organising it.

Working class political representation

The Workers' List stood Neville Alexander in the 1994 presidential elections. However there was no workers' candidate in the 1998 election won by Mbeki. The neo-liberal policies of the ANC, especially since 1998 have led to new calls for COSATU to assert itself politically and stand workers candidates against the ANC.

Thailand

Political economy

Thailand was the only South-East Asian country not colonised by a European power. In 1932, the absolutist monarchy was overthrown by a revolution led by a coalition of civilian politicians and military leaders. Thailand was transformed into a constitutional capitalist state, with periods of democratic rule and military dictatorship. Between 1957 and 1973 Thailand had an uninterrupted period of military rule, during which time unions were banned. In October 1973, a mass popular uprising, led by students, but significantly involving urban workers, overthrew the military dictatorship.

In October 1976 civil rights were crushed by a military coup. The ruling class were not able to keep up the repression for long, partly because of the level of struggle organised by workers in the city, and because of the activity of the Communist Party of Thailand in the countryside. Gradual liberalisation of the political system took place, partly in order to undermine political resistance from below, and by 1988 Thailand had a full parliamentary democracy once again.

In 1991, the army made a last ditch attempt to maintain significant political influence by staging a coup against a corrupt, but democratically elected government. In May 1992, the military was overthrown, by another uprising in Bangkok, resulting in the restoration of parliamentary democracy and the eventual reform of the political system.

The most recent parliamentary election in January 2001 - the most democratic election in the country's history - resulted in a landslide victory for Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party. The TRT leads a coalition of three parties with a total of 365 seats in the House of Representatives (the lower house).

Thailand is the 22nd largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Thailand's per capita GDP grew by 3.7% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 5.5% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 3.6% a year. Urbanisation is under 22%, but Bangkok is one of the world's thirty largest cities with over 7 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 10.7 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 85% (9.1 million); industry 3% (0.3 million); and services 12% (1.3 million).

In 1980, there were 24.3 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 71% (17.2 million); industry 10% (2.5 million); and services 19% (4.6 million). In manufacturing industry there were 1.9 million workers.

By 2000, there were 37.3 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 48% (17.9 million); industry 19% (7.1 million); and services 33% (12.3 million).

Unions

Working class organisation is weak, with union density standing at 3%, but public sector unions were banned until 1998 and private sector workers such as those who work in sweatshops face rapacious union-busting multinationals. However there has been some improvement in the last decade.

In 1991, it was estimated that only a few hundred unions out of the thousand officially registered were actually functioning – the vast majority were “paper unions” existing in name only. In 1992, Tanong Pho-am, president of the Labour Congress of Thailand disappeared during the coup – probably murdered by the military.

By 1997 there were 270,000 private sector union members and 160,000 in state sector associations. However in public utilities, rail and air density is over 50%, and Thai airways is 70% unionised, including technicians, pilots and stewards.

Within the unions, the development of rank and file groups, known as Klum Yarn, (for example the Coordinating Centre for Workers) is especially important.

Recent struggles

A ferocious dispute took place in 2000 at the Thai Krieng Durable textile factory. Bosses refused to negotiate with the union over pay, so workers organised a sit-in strike. The company sacked nearly 400 workers and their representatives. Police then attacked workers after they tried to protest outside the prime minister's home.

At gold jewellery makers Almond, 40 workers were sacked for trying to form a union in December 2000. A leader of the union was attacked with a metal rod. After an international campaign, all the workers were reinstated and the union recognised a year later.

In another victory, workers from the Light House Industry factory, a sub-contractor of US luggage giant Samsonite, successfully fought to get their jobs back. In October 2001, 600 were sacked (out of 1,400) and the remainder had their pay cut. In June 2002 the company sacked all 20 elected trade union reps at the plant, and when the 850 workers staged a stoppage in protest, they too were sacked. In July, workers handed in a letter to parliament written in their own blood. The workers were reinstated in September.

Iran

Political economy

Persia was a client state of the British Empire, and occupied by Britain and Russia during the Second World War, deposing the Shah and replacing him with his son. In 1951 the National Front government nationalised the oil industry, but this government was ousted in a coup in 1953.

Iran underwent rapid capitalist development under the Shah between 1950 and 1973. The "White Revolution" launched in the 1960s involved land reform and state's use of oil revenues to develop industries such as textiles, construction, steel and consumer goods. The Shah's rule was brutal – the secret police (SAVAK) organised state-run "Syndicates" and only his Resurgence party was legal.

By the early 1970s the number strikes increased, as did fundamentalist opposition to the Shah. In June 1977 police fired on a peaceful march in Tehran. In September 1978 oil workers in Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz and Abadan came out on strike, joining other workers on demonstrations in the cities. Workers' strike committees took over the factories, forming *shoras* (councils). The Shah fled in January 1979.

The Founding Council of the Iranian National Workers' Union was formed in March 1979. Well over a million workers marched on May Day. However, most of the left took the "anti-imperialism" of the Khomeini government as good coin, leaving the working class prostrate as the regime consolidated itself. The new "Islamic Republic" established in 1979, suppressed independent working class activity, and thousands of workers imprisoned.

Under the presidency of Rafsanjani, Iran began to adopt more moderate policies. This trend has accelerated under the leadership of his successor, Khatami, who won the 1997 election on the strength of promises to http://www.economist.com/research/backgrounders/displaystory.cfm?story_id=317891 make Iran more democratic and improve its image abroad. However clerics have continued to restrict the repression of free speech — a cause of student demonstrations in Tehran in 1999 and 2002.

The Boyad-e Mostazafin controls 40% of Iran's economy. It owns hundreds of factories, mines, construction companies, trading and transport companies, thousands of hectares of land with orchards and fruit – making it the largest economic institution in the Middle East. Iran's supreme religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, nominates the director of Boyad-e Mostazafin.

Iran is the 23rd largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Iran's per capita GDP grew by 5.1% a year. Between 1973 and 1998, it has shrunk by 1% a year. Urbanisation is 61% and Tehran is one of the world's thirty largest cities with over 7 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 6 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 64% (3.9 million); industry 17% (1.1 million); and services 18% (1 million).

In 1980, there were 12 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 39% (4.7 million); industry 26% (3.1 million); and services 35% (4.2 million). In manufacturing industry there were 1.6 million workers.

By 2000, there were 24 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 39% (9.4 million); industry 23% (5.5 million); and services 38% (9.1 million).

Anti-union laws

The only permitted labour organisation is the Biet Alomal, the “Workers’ House”, headed by the Minister of Labour. This body oversees the Islamic labour councils, made up of management and workers that discuss “workers’ issues”.

In 1991 a new labour code permitted the formation of unions, and for two years there were significant strikes. In 1993 strikes and workers’ demonstrations were banned, and attempts to establish a national workers’ organisation were broken up in 1997.

Recent struggles

Strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations by workers outside government buildings developed in 2001. Five hundred workers from the Simin textile factory in Isfahan in central Iran came out in March 2001 over wage arrears. More than a thousand workers from the Chit-e Rey textile factory south of Tehran demonstrated in front of the Majles (the Islamic parliament) over the same issue.

In May 2001, power plant workers went on strike simultaneously, causing 4-6 hours of power cuts in 25 provinces. It began at the Ghom power plant in central Iran, spreading to other sites. Steelworkers from the Khorasan factory in northwest Iran went on hunger strike in protest at the non-payment of wages.

Workers from the Baresh textile factory in the same city protested two months later and workers from the Jamko clothing and Shadan Pour shoe factories organised a joint demonstration in July 2001. Workers at both factories had not been paid for a year. In October thousands of workers in Isfahan demonstrated against the “restructuring” of the textile industry. On every occasion, the security forces attacked these workers.

Thousands of teachers demonstrated in January 2002, demanding pay rises and the right to form independent organisations. The teachers organised sit-ins for three days, followed by a strike involving 12,000 workers. Police and the military attacked the demonstrations. There are one and half million teachers in Iran, who live on the poverty line with no right to form a union.

Iranian Workers’ News reports dozens of other workers’ protests. Six hundred bus workers stopped work in December 2001 in Orumiyyeh – their third protest in nine months. The workers complained that overtime had not been paid for seven months and that they hadn’t been issued with work clothes for nine months. Textile workers in Kashan (central Iran) organised a sit-in in January 2002 after wages had not been paid for four months. Another sit-in involving 800 workers at the Rahimzadeh textile factory in Isfahan over wage non-payment took place in November 2001.

Philippines

Political economy

The Philippines was ruled by Spain from 1565 to 1898, and by the US until 1946. The legacy of the colonial era included the concentration of land ownership and of political and economic power in the hands of a small number of families.

The 21-year rule of Ferdinand Marcos (1965-86) was characterised by economic mismanagement, corruption and martial law. Marcos was forced to step down in the face of massive popular opposition, including by the two million people who occupied the EDSA highway to stop troops loyal to Marcos crushing the opposition.

A democratic system was established under Corazon Aquino (1986-92), who was followed by Fidel Ramos (1992-98) and Joseph Estrada in May 1998. Estrada was removed by a civilian coup backed by the military in January 2001. The vice-president, Gloria Arroyo, is now completing Estrada’s presidential term, which ends in June 2004.

The Philippines is the 25th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, the Philippines per capita GDP grew by 2.7% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 0.7% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 0.5% a year. Urbanisation is 58% and Manila is one of the world's twenty largest cities with nearly 11 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 7.8 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 71% (5.6 million); industry 12% (0.9 million); and services 17% (1.3 million).

In 1980, there were 18.4 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 52% (9.6 million); industry 15% (2.8 million); and services 33% (6 million). In manufacturing industry there were 2 million workers.

By 2000, there were 31.4 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 37% (11.6 million); industry 16% (5 million); and services 47% (14.8 million).

Unions

Union membership in 1995 was 3.5 million, or 12% density, but has declined since then. There is no united national union centre, and public sector workers can join unions but not strike. Unions are excluded from export processing zones.

Unions in the Philippines are organised at enterprise level, and there are nine trade union centres. The largest federations are pro-government. The TUCP claims one million (ICFTU says 450,000) and the FFW Catholic union has around 400,000 members. The National Confederation of Labour (NCL) claims over 100,000 members from 365 unions.

Rank and file organisations have been important for decades. The May First Movement (KMU), formed in 1980 as “the centre for militant unionism”, was aligned with the Communist Party of the Philippines. It was the only grouping not to sign the industrial peace accord in 1990. In the early 1990s more than 800,000 workers belonged to KMU-affiliated unions, and they organised a nationwide general strike against government cuts.

The Solidarity of Philippines Workers (BMP) labour organisation was formed in 1993. It emerged from KMU. The BMP is now the largest militant labour organisation in the Philippines. According to BMP president Victor Briz, there are nearly 33 million workers, but only 14 million in the formal sector. He also says 3.5 million workers are organised in unions – but only 500,000 have collective bargaining agreements.

The BMP is composed of 200 local unions, with a total membership of 100,000. It has 40,000 members in Manila. The BMP helped form the Fraternal Organisation of Union Presidents (KPUP), some 1,500 union presidents representing 200,000 workers as a step towards trade union unity. In September 2002 the BMP began a discussion on whether to transform itself from a labour rights campaign centre into a union centre. It has resolved to set up Bukolod – socialist campaign groups – in factories.

Anti-union laws

The law recognises the right of workers to form unions, but organising is restricted in the public sector and in export processing zones. The right to strike is recognised, but unions have to give advanced notice and exhaust all avenues of conciliation.

The Ministry of Labour can impose compulsory arbitration and order a return to work if it believes the industry is “vital” to the economy. There are also heavy penalties for illegal strikes – up to and including the death penalty.

Recent struggles

A study by the TUCP in 2000 found that nearly a thousand workers in 43 factories had been dismissed for trade union activity in export processing zones. Management have blocked union elections, threatened to shut factories if unions are established, intimidating members and sacking union leaders.

In 2001 workers won a two-year recognition battle at Toyota Motor Philippines Corporation, but the company sacked over 200 union members and refused their reinstatement. Workers were attacked by police on picket lines and the government bowed to the company's pressure, declaring workers protests illegal.

Working class representation

The Partido ng Manggagawa (Workers' Party, PM) participated in the May 2001 elections and won one seat. The PM has been the main force within the BMP. A new organisation, also called the Workers' Party, was formed in August 2002 after the merger of three socialist organisations – the PM, the Socialist Party of Labour (SPP) and the Democratic Proletarian

Party, PPD). These groups left the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in the early 1990s, breaking from its Maoist-nationalist politics. The PMP defines the Philippines as capitalist (not semi-feudal, semi-colonial) and calls for a workers' and peasants' government.

Pakistan

Political economy

Pakistan was founded in 1947, when Britain partitioned India. In 1958 General Ayub Khan staged a coup and brought the military to power. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) took power as president and became prime minister in 1973, but was deposed by General Zia ul-Haq in a coup in 1977.

After Zia died, elections were held and Benazir Bhutto became prime minister. Bhutto was ousted by the military for corruption in 1990, and replaced by Nawaz Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML). Sharif was also ousted for corruption in 1993, after which Bhutto became prime minister again.

Sharif won elections in 1997, but was ousted in a coup by General Musharraf in October 1999, who made himself president in 2001. In October 2002, the first national elections since the coup took place – though it was widely regarded as “seriously flawed”. Musharraf's favoured party, the PML, won 77 out of 232 seats, the PPP won 63 seats and the MMA, an electoral alliance of fundamentalists won 45 seats.

Pakistan is the 27th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Pakistan's per capita GDP grew by 1.7% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 3.1% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 2.3% a year. Urbanisation is 36% and Karachi is the 12th largest city in the world, with almost 12 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 16 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 72% (11.5 million); industry 12% (2 million); and services 16% (2.5 million).

In 1980, there were 30 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 63% (19 million); industry 13% (4 million); and services 24% (7 million). In manufacturing industry there were 2.5 million workers.

By 2000, there were 52 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 44% (22 million); industry 18% (9 million); and services 38% (20 million).

Unions

Pakistan has a number of union centres. There are three ICFTU affiliated centres: the PNFTU, which claims 250,000 members (1995); the APFOL, which claims 291,000 members (2001); and the APFTU, which claimed 600,000 members (1995). Government estimates put unionisation at 3%.

Anti-union laws

Under the Essential Services Maintenance Act 1952, the government can declare any enterprise a public utility and limit workers' rights. It covers state administration, government services and state enterprises such as oil and gas production, electricity generation and transmission, the state owned airline (Pakistan International Airlines) and ports. Workers can form unions in these sectors but not strike. Hospital workers, civil servants and defence workers (which includes rail workers) cannot form unions.

The Industrial Relations Ordinance 1969 allows other workers to form unions, but does not cover teachers or agricultural workers. Anti-union laws were imposed under martial law from 1977, when strikes and some unions were banned. In 1997 the Supreme Court overturned a ban on forming unions in TV and civil aviation, but upheld the ban on strikes.

In May 2000 the military government announced a ban on all outdoor political rallies, strikes, processions and demonstrations. In November 2001 public sector workers were prevented by law from appealing to the courts against dismissal. The government can end a strike that has lasted more than 30 days. Workers in export processing zones cannot form unions, bargain collectively or strike.

Recent struggles

In 2000, 60 workers were sacked for trying to form a union at the Dada Bhai Cement factory in Sind province. The leaders were members of the Pakistan Labour Party (LPP).

In the summer 2002 the government announced its plans to privatise Pakistan's education system. Teachers mobilised for 30 days of struggle, including public meetings and demonstrations across the Punjab. Over 5,000 participated in a protest meeting and blocked a main highway for over an hour in October. The government announced it was halting the privatisation.

Working class representation

The Pakistan Labour Party (LPP) was launched by JIT in 1997. Farooq Tariq is its general secretary. The JIT was expelled from the Militant/Socialist Party's CWI in 1997. The LPP won 13 seats in local government elections in 2001.

The Labour Party gained legal registration in 2002 and organised a socialist electoral campaign in October 2002 to contest the first national elections since the coup. The LPP's main slogan was "Get rid of the IMF and World Bank and workers will be better off". Overall the LPP got over 2% of the total votes cast in the districts where they stood, in what Farooq Tariq described as "the most rigged elections in the history of Pakistan". Tariq ran for a National Assembly seat in Lahore. He spoke at 37 meetings during the campaign, attracting 1,500 people – and was eventually "awarded" over 1100 votes.

Egypt

Political economy

In 1952 an army coup brought an end to monarchy in Egypt. Under Colonel Gamal Nasser, Egypt pursued radical nationalist policies. Under his successor, Anwar Sadat, president from 1970 to 1981, Egypt's political stance shifted towards the West and its economic policies became more liberal.

Hosni Mubarak of the National Democratic Party has been president since 1981. The main opposition is the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. It was allowed to take seats in the parliament in 2000, forming the largest opposition bloc.

Under Nasser large parts of the economy were nationalised – even in the early 1980s three-quarters of industrial production was carried out by the public sector. In 1991 Egypt agreed a programme of privatisation with the IMF/World Bank, though little has taken place.

Egypt is the 30th largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Egypt's per capita GDP grew by 1.5% a year. Between 1973 and 1998, it grew by just under 3% a year. Urbanisation is over 45%, and Cairo is one of the world's twenty largest cities with over 11 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 8.2 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 68% (5.6 million); industry 10% (0.8 million); and services 22% (1.8 million).

In 1980, there were 15.2 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 57% (8.8 million); industry 16% (2.4 million); and services 27% (4.2 million). In manufacturing industry there were 1.6 million workers.

By 2000, there were 25.8 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 32% (8.3 million); industry 24% (6.2 million); and services 44% (11.3 million).

Anti-union laws

The Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) was established under Nasser in 1957 as the centre of existing unions. Union membership is mainly in the public sector. All unions are required to belong to the ETUF, which claims 2.5 million members, and the ETUF is closely integrated with the ruling party.

Strikes are regarded as a form of disorder not a contractual dispute, under the state of emergency declared in 1981, and hence are illegal. Wildcat strikes took place in the late 1990s over issues such as privatisation, cuts in wages at state-owned enterprises, failure to pay annual bonuses and compulsory early retirement. These strikes were usually short-lived, and sometimes broken up by the security forces.

Recent struggles

In 1998 a wave of strikes and occupations hit Egyptian factories. Four thousand workers at the Transport and Engineering Company in Alexandria occupied their factory for three days in protest at management's failure to offer bonuses after posing a massive profit. Strikes broke out in the steel plants in Helwan and protests by women workers at the Bisco-Misr factory in Sawwah, both near Cairo. The ICFTU says there has been an increase in unofficial strike action over the last two years, as the influence of the state-run unions declines.

Bangladesh

Political economy

Since gaining independence in 1971, Bangladesh has suffered three military takeovers and 19 attempted coups. The country is governed by Khaleda Zia, whose Bangladesh Nationalist Party won a landslide victory over Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the prime minister, in Bangladesh's 2001 election. Sheikh Hasina, who leads the opposition Awami League, rejected the election result.

Bangladesh is the 33rd largest economy in the world. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Bangladesh's per capita GDP shrank by 0.4% a year. Between 1973 and 1990, it grew by 1.5% a year and from 1990 to 1999 by 3% a year. Urbanisation is approximately 25% and Dhaka is the 11th biggest city in the world with over 12 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 24 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 90% (21.6 million); industry 5% (1.2 million); and services 5% (1.2 million).

In 1980, there were 42 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 72% (30 million); industry 9% (4 million); and services 19% (8 million). In manufacturing industry there were 3 million workers.

By 2000, there were 70 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 63% (44 million); industry 10% (7 million); and services 27% (19 million).

In 1987 there were 700 enterprises employing 250,000 workers. By 1997 there were an estimated 2,000 export garment factories employing around 1.4 million workers – 85% women.

Unions

There is no single trade union centre in Bangladesh. Many unions are linked to political parties. The ICFTU-affiliated Bangladesh Confederation of Trade Unions reported 900,000 members, with approximately the same number in other unions. Therefore union density stands at around 3%.

Anti-union laws

There are many restrictions on union activities. Registration is mandatory, 30% of workers in any workplace must belong to a union before it can register, and unions cannot be registered on a national basis. Teachers, nurses, supervisory staff in the public sector are not allowed to form unions, neither are workers in export processing zones.

Workers in "essential services" are prohibited from striking. Strikes are only legal if 75% of the workforce have voted for, and strikes for longer than 30 days can be banned by the government. There are special powers to detain union activists and sentences can include 14 years hard labour for "crimes" committed during strike action.

Recent struggles

Workers strikes were part of the opposition parties' resistance to Khaleda Zia between 1990 and 1996. In 2001, on the eve of the end of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government, strikes gripped the country. Thousands of garment workers came out, followed by dockers in Chittagong.

According to the ICFTU, unions are registered in only 127 factories that make clothes for export, and few employers negotiate with them. The best example of independent trade union activity is the Bangladesh Independent Garment-Workers Union (BIGU), formed in 1994. The Asia-American Free Labor Institute (AAFLI), the international arm of the AFL-CIO, originally sponsored it.

BIGU is now the largest garment union in Bangladesh, covering over 500 garment factories in the main industrial centres of Dhaka and Chittagong, with a membership of over 50,000 workers. All union officials must either be currently working or

have worked in the export garment sector for a minimum of five years. Unlike most unions in Bangladesh, BIGU has no political affiliation, and gained legal registration in 1997.

Some academics have argued that conditions in the international export sector are the most favourable for organising unions in Bangladesh. Local manufacturers are forced to keep production centralised to maintain constant monitoring and surveillance over quality standards, rather than sub-contracting out.

Nigeria

Political economy

Nigeria became independence in 1960. Since the first military coup in 1966, and the subsequent civil war in 1967-70, the army has been the dominant political player and was out of power only briefly during the Second Republic (1979-83) and for a few weeks in 1993.

After the sudden death of the increasingly dictatorial General Sani Abacha in mid-1998, his successor as military head of state, General Abubakar, moved quickly to restore human rights, repair relations with the West and install a new civilian government. Political parties were formed to contest the elections in 1998-99, which culminated in May 1999 with Olusegun Obasanjo - a former military ruler turned civilian politician - becoming Nigeria's first elected president for 20 years. He is standing for re-election in April 2003.

Nigeria is the second largest economy in Africa. According to the OECD, between 1950 and 1973, Nigeria's per capita GDP grew by 2.9% a year. Between 1973 and 1998, it has shrunk by 0.6% a year. Urbanisation is 43% and Lagos is the sixth largest city in the world with over 13 million people.

The working class

According to the ILO, in 1950 there were 14 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was agriculture 77% (11 million); industry 7% (1 million); and services 16% (2 million).

In 1980, there were 26 million people in the labour force. The breakdown was agriculture 54% (14 million); industry 8% (2 million); and services 38% (10 million). In manufacturing industry there were v million workers.

By 2000, there were 45 million people in the labour force. In terms of types of employment, the breakdown was: agriculture 43% (19 million); industry 7% (3 million); and services 50% (23 million).

Anti-union laws

The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) was launched in 1978 by government decree as the sole legal union organisation. It currently claims 4 million members – 10% of the workforce – mainly in the public sector and large enterprises in the private sector.

In 1996 the military under Sanni Abacha decreed the reorganisation of unions and no-strike agreements. These were overturned in 1998. Since 1999 there have been strikes over wage arrears and the minimum wage. For example in February 2001 professors at Ambrose Alli University were sacked after striking for four months salary arrears.

The Trade Union Act states that no new union can be registered to represent employees where a trade union already exists. Under the Trade Unions (Amendment) Decree, 1996, check off payments are conditional on the inclusion of a “no strike” clause in collective agreements. The Trade Disputes Act allows for compulsory arbitration.

Recent struggles

In 1993 unions staged a general strike in protest at the failure to restore democracy. Although the NLC called off the strike, the oil workers union NUPENG stayed out for 10 days. In 1994 oil and energy workers again organised pro-democracy strikes.

In the last few years there was a wave of strikes and protests by workers over wage arrears and for an increase in the minimum wage. Lecturers and civil servants have been prominent in these struggles.

The Nigeria Labour Congress says it will embark on a nationwide strike if the government's promised 12% pay increase is not paid, and if deductions from workers wages for the National Housing Fund continue.

Trade Union membership and densities

Source: ILO World Labour Report 1997-98.

	Membership		Density (1)		Density (2)		Density (3)	
	1985	1995	1985	1995	1985	1995	1985	1995
China	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
India	5.9m	6.1m	6.6%	5.4%	-	-	26.5%	22.4%
Brazil	-	15.2m	-	32.1%	-	43.5%	-	66.0%
Mexico	9.5m	7.0m	54.1%	31.0%	54.1%	42.8%	59.6%	72.9%
Korea	1.0m	1.6m	8.6%	9.0%	12.4%	12.7%	-	-
Indonesia	-	1.0m	-	2.6%	-	3.4%	-	4.8%
Argentina	3.2m	3.2m	48.7%	25.4%	48.7%	38.7%	67.4%	65.6%
S. Africa	1.4m	3.2m	15.5%	21.8%	17.7%	40.9%	22.8%	51.9%
Thailand	0.2m	0.4m	3.3%	3.1%	4.3%	4.2%	-	5.2%
Iran	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Philippines	2.1m	3.6m	18.4%	22.8%	20.7%	38.2%	-	-
Pakistan	0.9m	1.0m	6.4%	5.5%	-	-	-	29.0%
Egypt	2.7m	3.3m	38.9%	29.6%	42.7%	38.8%	-	-
Bangladesh	1.1m	1.7m	15.3%	4.3%	-	-	-	7.5%
Nigeria	3.0m	3.5m	-	17.2%	-	-	-	54.8%
Britain	9.7m	7.3m	36.0%	26.2%	45.5%	32.9%	-	-

Density (1) measured as a percentage of the non-agricultural labour force.

Density (2) measured as a percentage of the wage and salary earners.

Density (3) measured as a percentage of the formal sector wage earners.

Number of strikes and lockouts

Source: ILO website 2003.

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
China				11	10	3	9	17	7	8	3	
India	1786	1825	1810	1714	1393	1201	1066	1166	1305	1097	927	656
Brazil	3164	1846	659	557	653	1034	1056	1258	630	546	508	
Mexico	118	150	136	156	155	116	96	51	39	33	32	26
Korea	1616	322	234	235	144	121	88	85	78	129	198	250
Indonesia	17	61	130	251	185	296	276	346	234			
Argentina	193										900	613
S. Africa	855	948	613	833	790	804			1324	560		
Thailand	11	9	14	33	23	15	39	18	23	8	16	13
Iran												
Philippines	197	183	182	136	122	93	94	89	93	92	58	60
Pakistan	42	99	94	40		25	24	30	30	20	9	4
Egypt	3	4	1	0	2	5	8	7	4	7	8	6
Bangladesh	12	5	3	11	11	2	5	1	0	1	4	4
Nigeria		126	125	187	107	137						

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Britain	701	630	369	253	211	205	235	244	216	166	205	212

Workers involved in strikes and lockouts

Source: ILO website 2003. (Thousands).

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
China				2	1	0.1	1	2	0.4	0.6	0.1	
India	1364	1308	1342	1252	954	846	990	939	981	1289	1311	690
Brazil	14099	14243	16805	2562	3596	2756	2278	2535	809	1251	1320	
Mexico	58	49	65	91	32	27	12	11	9	11	50	60
Korea	409	134	175	105	109	104	50	79	44	146	92	178
Indonesia	4	31	65	143	103	148	127	221	146			
Argentina	1737										2498	6761
S. Africa	178	351	176	150	156	327			212	323		
Thailand	5	4	10	8	6	8	17	9	12	2	8	6
Iran												
Philippines	57	68	55	48	35	49	54	32	52	34	16	21
Pakistan	30	62	116	73		15	11	19	8	6	5	0.2
Egypt	0.6	2	1	0	1	5	6	1	0.7	12	4	1
Bangladesh	60	15	0.5	6	6	6	25	0.4	0	6	2	2
Nigeria		0.3	0.3	0.3	1	2						

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Britain	727	298	176	148	385	107	174	364	130	93	141	183

Working days lost as a result of strikes and lockouts

Source: ILO website 2003. (Millions).

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
China				0.003	0.016	0.4	0.001	0.003	0.8	1	0.3	
India	32.7	24.1	26.4	31.2	20.3	2.1	16.3	20.3	17.0	22.0	26.8	16.7
Brazil	117.8			17.6	69.3	1.7	22.2	22.0	6.9	16.8	5.9	
Mexico	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.4	1.3	0.7	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4
Korea	6.4	4.5	3.3	1.5	1.3	1.4	0.4	0.9	0.4	1.5	1.4	1.9
Indonesia	0.04	0.3	0.6	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.3	2.5	1.3			
Argentina	2.3										6.2	12.4
S. Africa	12.3	3.0	1.2	1.9	1.1	2.2			0.7	0.7		
Thailand	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.08	0.2	0.09	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2
Iran												
Philippines	1.0	1.3	1.1	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.2	0.3
Pakistan	0.2	0.2	0.6	0.4		0.3	0.06	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.7
Egypt	0.002	0.002	0.001	0	0.001	0.02	0.004	0.006	0.002	0.022	0.004	0.001
Bangladesh	0.08	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.016	0.003	0.08	0.02	0	0.2	0.002	0.002
Nigeria												

	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Britain	4.1	1.9	0.8	0.5	0.6	0.3	0.4	1.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.5