Informal Workers & the Indian State

RINA AGARWALA
JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
WIEGO WORKSHOP
Regimes of Accumulation

**Agrarian**
- Regulations: Formal L; Formal K; SER
- Space: Factory floor
- Organization: Trade Union
- State-intermediary L & K

**Industrial**
- Regulations: Formal L; Formal K; SER
- Space: Factory floor
- Organization: Trade Union
- State-intermediary L & K

**Financial**
- De-regulation: IW ideal; IK “fix”; non-SER normalized
- Space: dispossession
- Organization: ?
- State:?

**History of informal vs. formal**

**K-L relations include FW AND IW**

**IW as “class for itself”**

**IW as ‘class in itself’**
State

Informal Workers

Gramscian Market Hegemony #1

Fraserian Emancipation Countermovement #3

Polanyian Protection Countermovement #2

Capital

Triple Movement:
1. Marketization
2. Protection
3. Emancipation

Burrawoy 2003

Fraser 2013
State’s Hegemonic Project

Informality is the new and overt normal

- 50% rise in large, organized sector firms (private and public)
- New category: “informal-regular” (contract, lower wages, no non-wage benefits)
- Unequal, side-by-side employment (automobiles, garments)

Non-agricultural labor is growing; not “jobless”; just BAD jobs (not manufacturing)

- Services: 26% in 1999 to 31% in 2011
- Construction: 5% in 1999 to 11% in 2011

Informal work is increasingly male

- Drop in female labor force participation rate since 1980s.
- Despite improved efforts to capture informal work
- Pronounced among poor households
- Women becoming increasingly invisible (domestic work, garbage collection, home-based work)
Joint Solidarity against State Project

IWs and FWs joint action for first time

- February 20-21, 2013: Longest mass strike since Independence
- Autoworkers strike in Maruti (Harayana in 2012)

Threatens basis of the state’s political project of defining informal workers as an alternative to formal workers

Quick response: Altered business strategy to increase outsourcing to companies
New Legislations

Trying to codify, regulate, and protect within contemporary employment relationships

(Street Vending, Bidi, Construction, Informal Workers’ Social Security)

Domestic Workers into existing laws and new Comprehensive Legislation—WHY?

- RECOGNITION
- THREAT of enforcement
- Expand our notion of who is a worker, who is an employer, what is work
Identity Cards

State recognition for their work

(Bidi manufacturing, construction, waste-pickers, home-based garment workers)

Dignity
Access to citizenship rights (education, water)
Against police harassment
Platform for demands on legal protection

*Folding state into labor exploitation relationship
*Folding SE into proletariat
Welfare Boards

Construction Workers’ Comprehensive Legislation & Welfare Boards

- Modicum of accountability on employers through tax
- Accrued massive sums to cover reproductive costs
- Mobilizational tool
- Creating an identity as “workers”
- Weekly off and timely payments

Mired with challenges

**Remain the only attempt (by workers) to address informal workers’ reproductive costs

Bidi (national); garment workers, domestic workers (some states)
State conditions success & failure

Greater success in populist and liberalizing political-economies

Empowerment vs. cooptation
Global Counter-Movements

South to North?

More beneficiaries - women, migrants, occupations

Politics of Recognition - laws and identity

Politics of Redistribution using a rhetoric of “citizenship rights” as workers with reproductive costs

Variety of organization types - unions, NGOs, cooperatives
Stage of Counter-Movements

Infant stage

But crucial stage of mobilization under common frame

Stage that precedes attainment of legal rights