



International Labour Office Neue Publikationen

There is an alternative: Economic policies and labour strategies beyond the mainstream Nicolas Pons-Vignon (Ed.)

Many progressive economists and trade unionists have sought to engage in dialogue and negotiations with capital and governments during the global financial crisis, hoping they could achieve the adoption of reasonable and balanced policies. They may have done so because such an approach used to work in the past, especially in social-democratic contexts, or because, in the early days of the crisis, they were listened to as respectfully as during the high time of the “Keynesian compromise” in economics.

But as the General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) Sharan Burrow puts it in this volume, “If during the crisis workers’ organizations could have anticipated that a new era of dialogue had begun, the moment has clearly passed”. Are neoliberal policies, and the huge increases in inequality they have caused, responsible for the crisis? The policies adopted in the wake of the crisis tend to give credence to this view – from the absence of any meaningful regulation (or rather, the curtailment) of financial “innovation”, to the public bailing out of banks by states who then in turn reduce their spending, thus passing the costs of the crisis on to ordinary workers and unemployed people.

Trade unions have been using their organizational and institutional power to resist attacks on social and labour rights. Nevertheless, after decades of retreat, the financial crisis is rapidly weakening further their traditional pillars of power and influence.

Labour faces the urgent need to overcome the dilemma that it cannot let its influence slip further, while a more oppositional strategy carries the risks of further marginalization if it fails. Trade unions have recognized the need to fight precarious employment, to build new alliances (for instance to defend the rights of domestic workers), to make efforts to organize workers and to regain democratic control over markets.



ISBN: 9789221245810

Preis: 22 Euro

Seiten: 140

Erschienen: Juni 2011

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ISBN 978-92-2-124581-0- Seiten, 22 Euro (zuz  gl. Porto)

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