

On Labour Organising: A Comment

ANNAVAJHULA J C BOSE¹

¹Professor (Retd.), Department of Economics, Shri Ram College of Commerce, Delhi

Abstract

How a case for labour unions can be made is highlighted in this paper to counter the implicit or explicit bias of economists and managers against labour organising. Unions and labour internationalism matter for the working people to improve their own welfare. And there is no reason to assert that they cannot facilitate social and economic welfare at large as well. Social democratic ideas and practices confirm these viewpoints and possibilities.

Keywords: Model choice in economics, Typical managerialism, Unions, Labour internationalism, Social democracy

1. Introduction

In going about doing research, we are told, didactically, to be objective and to avoid bias as also conflicts of interest. However, in practice, this is a tall order to accomplish, especially when we take up exploratory inquiry, for example, about what employer and labour associations do. The dark side of labour unions is usually emphasized by pro-establishment people with an implicit or explicit bias in favour of employers and their associations. In doing so, more often than not, either a pet theory is purported to be proved or evidence to the contrary is ignored.

Anti-union judgements are easily formed via economic education which extols the pet theory of perfect competition. Management education and managerialism also serve the same purpose but differently. The theoretical subject of Soft Human Resource Management (HRM)—concerned about total employee commitment and wellbeing—pontificates about industrial peace to be achieved by mutual trust, information sharing and grievance redressal mechanism in the backdrop of a history of “Hard HRM” (treating workers as disposable alongside expecting high work performance from them), frequent hostilities and bitter labour-management battles.

Management practitioners, obsessed with the belief that their strategies alone can change the world for the better, are typically anti-union and indulge in rabid union-busting on the grounds that unions cause wage increases unwarranted by productivity increases and consequently high inflation, and that unions do not permit, by industrial militancy, tough commercial decisions on their part, including the introduction of new organisational practices and technologies. The irony is that neither the theory nor the practice of managerialism on these lines has brought about eternal give-and-take industrial peace. While many non-Marxist industrial relations scholars, inspired by the soft-HRM-theorist Guest (1987; 1990), continue to endorse union-free workplaces, Marxists, inspired by workers’ struggles, continue to think that unions do matter for the dignity of workers despite there being grave external and internal difficulties faced by the unions leading to low and declining union density (Yates, 1998). The external difficulties are anti-labour bias of the laws, the exceptionally close alliance between business and the government, and the deep animosity of the media toward organized labour. The internal difficulties are failure to aggressively organize new members, internalizing the employer strategy of divide and rule, corruption in the labour movement, lack of consistent union democracy, internecine inter-union rivalries and the lack of an independent labour politics.

One need not be a Marxist to defend labour organising. It may be noted that like the Marxists, there were, in the distant past, “conservative radicals” or social democrats such as the institutional economist John Commons who had presented enlightening perspectives about industrial democracy which have relevance for today (Chasse, 2003).

Interestingly, how trade unions--right wing, left wing, and independent--ought to reinvent themselves by addressing the “profound alienation faced by workers on the one hand and the need for shifting from collective bargaining to a participative or quality of work life programmes on the other in conjunction with the need for integrating with a larger social and political movement, has now become a hot frontier research topic” for scholars of labour relations imbued with a variety of ideological influences—liberal as also radical (Ramaswamy, 1994; Moody, 1997; Venkata Ratnam, 2001).

The review in this paper is posited in this context in order to highlight how certain definitive viewpoints have recently emerged in favour of unions contrary to the overwhelming bias against labour organising, and decimation of unions in the world over the past four decades of neoliberalism.

2. Model Choice

Conclusions differ by model choice in economic education. Introductory economics students reading Mankiw (2012) about the power and glory of the theoretical world of perfectly competitive markets organising economic activities, are given the conclusion that minimum wages and labour unions lead to outcomes worse than the ideal free market efficient outcomes. However, if they read Komlos (2023) or Myatt (2023) and Hill and Myatt (2010) about the real-world existing economy dominated by multinational oligopolies, they can appreciate the conclusion that unions and minimum wages do redress the imbalance of power between capital and labour. Once we are not in the price-taking model, but in the model about the world of market power setting wages and prices (by monopsony and monopoly power), we understand that minimum wages and labour unions “do not cause unemployment; instead, they increase the living standards of workers at the expense of corporate profits”, thereby resulting in an agreeable egalitarian income distribution. In so far as perfect competition involving uncountable mom-and-pop enterprises is there only on the blackboards of economics classrooms, no wonder it breeds bias against empirically justifiable labour welfare promoting interventions required to convert the real-world economy of imperfect competition into a just or ethically agreeable economy. It may be noted that Angus Deaton, a Nobel-laureate in economics, has lately and ferociously rebuked economists for failing to understand that capitalism is all about power (Keane, 2024). There is a never- ending tug of war between capital and labour.

A historical examination of this war anywhere in the world reveals that unlike many who see labour unions as “unnecessary overreaches into the workplace”, labour unions are key to protect employees from employer abuse. As Stubbs (2023) has pointed out, for example, in the American context of capital-labour conflicts, “Our history seems to suggest that the place of the union is to help strike the balance between a capitalist system and a republican government. From balancing a company’s offers of housing and medicine with workers’ ability to make independent choices to compromising over how many hours should be dedicated to work vs. personal pursuits, the American experience with unions centres around creating balance. Since the 1800s, unions have remained an important part of our system. Their prominence has fluctuated over time but as the same problems with market power and corporate concentration of the 1800s are rearing their heads again, unions are also resurging. Additionally, the uniquely American cultural view of unions seems to be alive and well, with most labour proponents still intuitively endorsing the American Dream that has inspired generations prior.”

3. Reality Check

In general, neither the real-world managements nor the business schools imparting management education and media have taken seriously research in favour of unions (Dinardo and Lee, 2003; Kucera and Sarna, 2004; Bivens, 2009; Lazes and Cook, 2015) that they do not cause business failures or impede international competitiveness by upholding the “core labour standards of the International Labour Organisation. Freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, effective abolition of child labour, and elimination of discrimination in respect of employment” and a safe and healthy working environment constitute the core labour standards.

Recently, Banerjee et al. (2021) have reported that unions are not only good for workers but also good for communities and democracy: “The benefits of unionization extend far beyond the workplace. High union density is consistently associated with a much broader set of positive spillover effects across multiple dimensions. Not only do unions directly benefit the workers they represent, but their political advocacy helps to drive an array of strongly positive outcomes more broadly, especially in states where unions represent a sizeable share of the workforce. These positive outcomes include wage increases, better health benefits, easier access to unemployment insurance, access to paid sick leave, access to paid family and medical leave, and unrestricted voting opportunities.

It is therefore critical that policymakers enact reforms that restore a meaningful right to organize and collectively bargain. Building union density is not just a worker or workplace issue, but it is also a mechanism to uplift families and communities. The relationship demonstrated between high union density and higher household incomes, access to health care and paid leave, and fewer voting restrictions highlights the importance of protecting the right of workers to organize. This right could be a fundamental component in strengthening economic security, quality of life, civil and voting rights, and racial justice in our communities.”

Greenhouse (2022) has pointed out that unions induce economic growth by reducing income inequality. In fact, according to him, “the decline of unions over the past few decades may have contributed to slower economic growth” in terms of “secular stagnation”. And unions actually lead to “higher productivity in some sectors, such as education and construction, while making no overall difference on productivity in sectors like manufacturing”. Finally, unions ensure that workers are treated with respect.

The industrial relations research unit of the Warwick Business School is an exception. It has justified the increasing industrial action in recent times in the UK and the consequent successes involving improved pay settlements due to the unbearable cost of living crisis (WBS, 2003). What it says is worth noting: “People talk about strike threats, militancy, and union barons.

This frames industrial action in a very specific way, presenting it as an external threat that has no place in the way society should operate. That extends to the contentious idea that strike action is measured in working days lost. There are less loaded ways of describing those days. The absence of unions doesn’t mean the absence of discontent among the workforce. What unions do is represent the workforce in a de-personalised way. They can channel inevitable, occasional conflict in manageable ways so it can be resolved. In fact unions have been called managers of discontent. There are always legitimately differing interests in the workplace. And if that’s not recognised then conflict can find an outlet in other ways, such as increased turnover and absenteeism, reduced motivation, as well as difficulties in recruitment – so, other costs. In some conditions, strike action can actually be beneficial for employers. It can save on labour costs, which may be helpful if a company is facing financial pressure. There may also be a productivity bounce after a strike action, which is fascinating. Taking strike action can have a profound and positive psychological impact for workers who spend their working lives being told what to do. This can be about feeling some reassertion of control over life and may help to explain why employers sometimes see an increase in worker productivity after industrial action.”

The incipient ecological unionism also points to the emerging commitment of some unions to sustainable/regenerative development. “There are no jobs on a dead planet”, as the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) says. Such unions talk about an inclusive and sustainable, low-carbon economy with decent and green jobs. The Just Transition Centre, established in 2016 by the ITUC and partners, “brings together workers and their unions, businesses and governments in social dialogue and stakeholder engagement with communities and civil society to ensure that labour has a seat at the table when planning for a Just Transition to a low-carbon world”. These efforts reflect ideas of social movement unionism or social unionism, and national as also global governance by social dialogue for social and environmental sustainability (TUDCN, 2017).

In the Indian context, an exemplary case of red and green politics merging by way of labour unionism cum ecological unionism is the evolution of Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM). There is well-researched documentation about how it had “represented the concerns and interests of the working class, especially the contract workers, by shaping the industrial wage labourer and the farmer as a defender of the environment; and by factoring in how this clashed with overwhelming cultural notions around the Adivasi feted as a green warrior and a bulwark against modernity.

The CMM addressed the inter-connected discontents of peasants, workers, farmers and Adivasis. Its critique of India’s forest policy and Green Revolution; its choice to echo the voice of those affected by water pollution as well as over-extraction by large-scale industries; its respect for tribal cultural spaces and histories; its opposition to large dams and canals and support for small-scale stop dams and lift irrigation systems; its attempts to reclaim lost knowledge about local eco-systems, and to restate enduring connections between communities and the forest eco-systems; its defence of biodiversity; its opposition to the ruination of local economies; its commitment to alternative technological/developmental regimes, and its struggles for fair wages, enhanced bonuses, provision of provident funds, gratuities, leave, better working conditions, and more facilities for the workers and their families like housing benefits, and so on are all perfectly exemplary” (see Bose, 2023).

4. Good Unionism

All the same, which kind of unionism matters most for worker welfare as also union revitalization continues to remain a controversial topic. In this connection business unionism and political unionism are clearly disapproved. And service-based unionism, social unionism (Dodd, 2018) and revolutionary unionism (Burns, 2022) are upheld as good for the future of workers.

Business unionism is narrowly bothered about “improvement in the price of labour for unionized employees within a largely accepted capitalist economy” and has a tendency to downgrade itself to yellow or company unionism sold out to the employers. By contrast, the welfare or social movement unionism is considered a better option because it adopts “broad goals oriented towards the achievement of social justice”; extends the “terrain of union action outwards beyond the workplace to the community via labour-community alliances”; and recreates “unions themselves as social movements mobilizing members against workplace and wider social injustice”.

Political unionism, which has been rampant in India since long (Ahn, 2010), refers to a trade union aligned with a political party. It “does not best serve the interests of union members and workers, not only in India but elsewhere in the world. As the popularity of the political party in the government goes down, the popularity of the trade union also goes down. Furthermore, this linkage with the political party can drive away potential union members who may not share the political agenda of the party. Too many such unions with too little unity, political dependency, low unionization rates, non-representation of massive informal workers, non-compliance of labour rights, weakened bargaining power and insufficient investment for training and education define India’s contemporary labour movement” and consequently its impotence.

Hence, it is rightly suggested that “service-based unionism would be a more optimal recourse to regain collective bargaining power and offer a more useful vision to workers and society”. This alternative is “focused on providing labour market services related to job information, replacement, training and retraining, benefits, and so on, so that it can help improve the economic conditions of workers who are deprived, marginalized and contingent”. It also adopts innovative and aggressive organizing strategies in relation to the voiceless informal workers, young people, migrant workers and women.

Radical or revolutionary or class struggle unionism does not exist now. The revolutionary union has “become a historical relic -- the last active revolutionary union is the IWW -- the Industrial Workers of the World -- which, founded in 1905, was sacked in 1919 by the US government and has not recovered since then...Revolutionary unionism remains the great untried experiment - its vision of the world - a world without Capital and capitalist exploitation of workers -- hasn't yet come about...Will it come about again? Who knows?... the State has created a variety of secret police organizations, namely the FBI (created in 1919) and the CIA (created in 1948), who actively work to prevent large-scale social organizing for change. The lesson learned by authorities in response to the great labour upheavals of times past was to infiltrate and destroy popular movements before they get too powerful” (Neal, 2011).

This kind of union “focuses on an unending battle between Labor and Capital (not an endless battle -- rather, one where either Capital wins, reducing us to the level of serfs, or Labour wins, in which case capitalism ends), and recognizes that Labor produces all that is of value in society. The revolutionary union is centred around direct action, as opposed to the strike. The strike is seen as the last weapon of the worker, and not even the most effective one. Workers are most effective in pushing their agendas while still on the job, using a variety of direct action tactics. In revolutionary unions, there is no status hierarchy between workers -- no distinction between senior and junior workers. Moreover, there is no union bureaucracy or leadership to decide for workers what does or does not get done. All initiative comes from below -- from the rank-and-file, who, by their own efforts, make their wishes felt and known. This approach produces a considerably more democratic union, with an active, informed membership. Revolutionary unions practice industrial unionism; that is, the idea that instead of workers dividing themselves into manifold trades, and defending their interests to the exclusion of others, there are, instead, only two classifications in working society -- workers and capitalists. That is, those who work for a living, and those who live on others' work. Those who take orders, and those who give them. The revolutionary unionist seeks One Big Union, instead of many little ones. The logic behind this is that capitalists tend to close ranks and defend their common class interest...against so unified a foe, can a divided workforce possibly prevail?

The history of business unionism reveals that it cannot...Solidarity is the glue that holds the revolutionary union together, which is both an asset and a liability. It is a liability because it depends on workers closing ranks and working together as a whole, which doesn't always occur. Scabs, or workers who cross the picket line during a strike, are always a threat to organized labour solidarity. Because unions represent large numbers of people, organizing solidarity is a daunting task, and is often unsuccessful. When it works, it works well” (Neal, 2011).

Left radicals emphasize that history clearly tells workers that they will never willingly get from the corporates the living wages, skill development opportunities, and the security necessary to plan for the future without their unions strongly fighting for them. Unions thinking of becoming social unions are advised by them to learn a lot from how the World Social Forum with its “Another World is Possible” agenda is now in a shambles, sabotaged by corporate infiltration and neo-fascist political forces in the world. And the ultimate dream of having one big radical union uniting all the workers of the world for establishing a credible alternative economy and society should not be given up even as the exploitation of much of labour such as gig and platform labour (Heiland, 2020) with unlikely representation and workers’ silence is a complex problem to solve. Left radicals emphasize that history clearly tells workers that they will never willingly get from the corporates the living wages, skill development opportunities, and the security necessary to plan for the future without their unions strongly fighting for them. Unions thinking of becoming social unions are advised by them to learn a lot from how the World Social Forum with its “Another World is Possible” agenda is now in a shambles, sabotaged by corporate infiltration and neo-fascist political forces in the world. And the ultimate dream of having one big radical union uniting all the workers of the world for establishing a credible alternative economy and society should not be given up even as the exploitation of much of labour such as gig and platform labour (Heiland, 2020) with unlikely representation and workers’ silence is a complex problem to solve.

5. Labour Internationalism and Historical Reckoning

Labour transnationalism or internationalism also matters for labour welfare. Otherwise known as global labour solidarity, it is the modern paraphrasing of “Workers of the World, Unite!” call owed to the hoary communist signalling of Marx and Engels.

The famous pro-labour sociology professor Scipes (2016) had given a sound introductory grounding of this topic as follows: “Global labour solidarity is an act, or an on-going set of actions, by workers and/or their organizations, and/or their allied organizations, as well as by writers, artists and other activists to support workers and/or their organizations across political community borders in their efforts to enhance workers’ lives, wages, working conditions, and/or their very existence as determined by those affected. It is desirable that to strengthen the power and well-being of workers globally, workers must develop solidarity across political community borders in addition to developing solidarity with workers of their own country; global labour solidarity does not undercut solidarity by workers in the same country, but enhances the power, well-being and knowledge of workers globally.”

“This solidarity must be on the basis of mutual respect and support, which precludes concepts of “clientelism”; a unidirectional flow of ideas, money and other resources; and domination by one labour movement over another (i.e., labour imperialism). This solidarity can emerge from either southern or northern workers or their organizations, can include multiple labour organizations, and can be directed toward either southern or northern workers and their organizations.”

“This solidarity may be between workers/organizations on the same level of political organization, or between workers/organizations at different levels of political organization. This solidarity may be motivated by self-interest, mutuality or altruism.”

There are many types of global labour solidarity with research and documentation done on them, according to Scipes, “ to help workers, their organizations and their allies, in their struggles: (a) to establish and maintain unions, to improve wages, working conditions, security and other workplace-related issues; (b) against common multinational or transnational corporations; (c) to improve the lives of workers and their families outside of the workplace, such as in their communities; (d) to support workers’ efforts through innovative legal strategies and tactics, and utilization of treaty “side agreements,” and to try to protect workers from victimization through the legal and political institutions; (d) against global and/or regional political-economic plans [e.g., NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement), FTAA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas)], or the “commodity consensus” and other projects that are deemed detrimental to their self-interests (as defined by them)]; (e) against militarism and/or invasion; (f) against imperial activities; (g) to support oppressed peoples; and (h) to liberate themselves”.

It was observed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, according to Scipes, that through these ways of labour internationalism, “working people and some unions, along with progressive allies, have been reaching across political community boundaries for a number of years to try to develop global labour solidarity with other workers, their organizations and their allies.

Some of these projects have been established by labour confederations, international unions, and Global Union Federations (GUFs); some have been by national unions and labour centres; and a growing number are by union members and staffers as well as by those outside of the labour movement—what can be called “grassroots labour internationalism”—each who want to build support for workers, their organizations, and their allies. The increasing willingness to do so is hopeful.”

However, there is a caution to be added to the above positive developments, according to Scipes: “Global labour solidarity is a process, and a strategy, for improving working people’s lives around the planet; it is aimed at increasing workers’ power to determine their lives, both inside and outside the workplace. But it does not provide the goal to which workers’ collectively aspire. That discussion, which started in the 1840s in Europe, continues...this discussion must be done from a global perspective, and it must be developed democratically from the grassroots: it cannot be imposed from above... it must be done in conjunction with other global movements, such as women’s, students, peasants, the urban poor, the indigenous, etc. It must, in short, seek liberation for all—but what that means remains to be determined. Whatever goal is chosen, however, it must be done in conjunction with the planet, not separately.”

Scipes is, thus, suggesting that unions must dedicate themselves not just to social sustainability goals but also environmental sustainability goals.

Bieler and Lindberg (2011) too are great scholars on global labour solidarity. They have grounded the discussion of how “globalisation has put national labour movements under severe pressure, due to the increasing transnationalization of production, with the production of many goods being organised across borders, and the informalisation of the economy”. Through a range of case studies, they examine “the possibilities and obstacles to transnational solidarity of labour in a period of global restructuring and changing global political economy”. In the process, we come to know “successful and failed transnational solidarity covering inter-trade union co-operation as well as co-operation between trade unions and social movements within the formal and informal economy, and the public and private sector”.

Munck (2022) is not pessimistic about the emergence of labour internationalism now against the very powerful big capital internationalism as embodied in the World Economic Forum (WEF). He makes the historically-rooted case for it as follows despite the business schools funded by corporations supporting the WEF and not labour transnationalism as represented, for example, by the Global Labour Justice-International Labour Rights Forum.

“Workers were born in blood in the original industrializing countries and in the colonial world, violence being at the very heart of this process. This was followed by the Industrial Revolution in the mid-18th century and early 19th century as the new capitalist mode of production took shape with the capital/wage labour relation at its core. The period from the end of the Second World War up to the early 1970s was the “golden era” when Western capitalism secured a considerable degree of stability with strong trade unions, labour regulation and social welfare provision. From the mid-1970s, this golden era started disappearing alongside the rise of globalisation and the internet with neoliberalism as the dominant economic policy. This had a cataclysmic effect on labour and its organisation. During this time the old imperialist divide of an industrial North and an agricultural South broke down with the development of “world factories” and free trade zones in the South, where the outsourcing of Northern production lines reached a peak and saw a vast layer of workers, mostly women, in the South incorporated into the exploitative capitalist machine. During the last four decades of neoliberalism, work became increasingly precarious both in the North and in the South so much so that now workers everywhere have the option of either accepting increased vulnerability and precarity or striving for the creation of solidarities and collective action that might protect them and form part of a new democratic and sustainable future for work.”

In this scenario, for a global labour movement to develop and represent the emerging global working class, “it would have to do two things: first, it would need to forge more egalitarian alliances and articulate its programme with other social movements, such those around global justice, sustainable development and gender equity; second, its international strategy would need to break with the traditional corporatist trade union strategies and seek more imaginative and creative ways of working” (Munck, 2022).

There are, thus, well-grounded pro-labour critical reflections on how the labour movement can rejuvenate itself from its past drawbacks.

6. Conclusion

It is clear from the above review that there is anti-labour-organising bias by clever design as also ahistorical blindness in the typical economic way of thinking and managerialism. Little wonder that the capital-labour conflict is ignored and, when considered, not resolved amicably with mutual gains and so it never withers away.

It is high time that economic education dropped perfect competition and began discussing matters of economy and society with the model choice of imperfect competition so that unwarranted implicit bias against unions is dropped. Unions provide countervailing power to powerless workers against oligopolies and monopolies.

It is also high time that management got into the business of changing the world by reinventing themselves with a clear public value purpose to bring “humanity, sustainability, generosity and innovation to the business sector”, as the exceptional Cardiff Business School avows. This would imply, for labour uplift, that they seriously examine the distributional conflicts between capital and labour in the real-world and that they do not ignore evidence in favour of labour organising. This would also imply that they need to become positive about the “initiatives designed to enhance the quality of working life through extending the democratic control of workers over the workplace and the economy” as the social democratic journal *Economic and Industrial Democracy* from the Uppsala University does.

Unions matter now for labouring people more than ever because the corporate pursuit of profit continues to transform the economies in ways that increase worker hardship and insecurity. There are pressing service-based and social (including ecological) concerns to attend to. Unions will, therefore, have to transform themselves suitably to be at least an effective countervailing power against the attacks on them from the corporate cowboys and the governments subservient to them. This is a takeaway which is all the more relevant in India where the annual affair of general strike shows the “astonishing mobilising power of trade unions” on the one hand, and on the other, there is declining political power to win progressive labour reforms on their part in the face of neoliberal onslaughts from governments and employers (Pratap, 2022).

Unions are integral to social democracy as a middle path pragmatist ideology “which prescribes the use of democratic collective action to extend the principles of freedom and equality valued by democrats in the political sphere to the organization of the economy and society, chiefly by opposing the inequality and oppression created by laissez-faire capitalism” (Jackson, 2016). Labour organising, negotiated change (Venkata Ratnam, 2003) and good labour relations are part and parcel of social democratic theory and practice.

Social democracy is not a defunct political idea at all so as to devalue and not pursue in the contemporary worldwide context of increasing power imbalances and income and wealth inequalities. The pro-labour distributional policies of social democracy strengthen collective bargaining and the right to form labour unions alongside short-run as also long-run full employment policies of the government, which modify income distribution so as to make effective demand buoyant. They also bring about good labour relations which will also improve the propensity of workers to contribute to the production process. Thus, broad-based economic growth (inclusive development) is taken care to be stable from both the demand and supply sides (Lavoie and Stockhammer, 2013; Tcherneva, 2014).

This is a compelling insight of munificent beneficence from the Post-Keynesian economics upholding social contract between citizens and governments by social democracy. Its appeal never dies because of the unquestionable Keynesian insight that “capitalism is inherently unstable and needs to be wisely managed”; and the undisputable evidence in European countries that “higher wages and progressive income redistribution do indeed improve macro-economic performance and benefit both workers and firms, especially when supported by aggregate demand management” (Storm, 2020).

Social democracy has been observed, documented and debated as the Nordic model of governance, equality, and social and economic policy for welfare, innovation and prosperity (Brezis et al., 2018). The question is whether this social liberal model can be replicated all over the world. It should be replicated because it has proved that there is no classic equity-efficiency trade-off that the typical economic way of thinking has concocted (Komlos, 2023) and thereby created implicit and explicit biases against labour politics of egalitarianism, and state regulation of free market capitalism.

Despite the fact that the welfare state ideology of social democracy has been on the wane in the neoliberal world over the last four or five decades, the case for feasible social democratic reimagination of mixing markets with state continues to be made (e.g. Hodgson, 2021). And if its appeal is discussed over a semester of interdisciplinary social science education, students as future citizens and policy makers can uphold enlightened ideas and practices that really matter for establishing an inclusive economy and society, which is widely perceived as a final legitimate goal. Similarly, the environmental sustainability goal is perceived as another final legitimate goal. The case for progressive capitalism which also factors in the unions joining the fight against environmental abuse and is associated with social or republican democracy as made by Stiglitz (2019) is part and parcel of the burgeoning sanity project of building a fairer and sustainable society. Political change in terms of moving away from elitist liberal democracy to public opinion democracy as social democracy and finally to participative republican democracy or deliberative democracy is the need of the hour (Bresser-Pereira, 2004) to factor in people’s voices from below. In the absence of this change, and the presence of democratic recession and depression, unions will not be positively taken by the powers that be.

The achievement of social and environmental sustainability goals that social or republican democracy can address better, can be tracked through Multidimensional Inclusiveness Index and Composite Environmental Sustainability Index, as discussed in Dorffel and Schuhmann (2022), and Jain and Mohapatra (2023) respectively.

These are stories of metrics the evaluation of which is not the concern here but they should be studied as well by social science students wondering about institutions of “good society”, and “good life” therein.

Whether neoliberalism will be replaced by progressivism on the above lines is a multi-million dollar question, though, so to say.

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