

Work, Employment and Society: Special Issue Call for Papers

The organisation & mobilisation of ‘unusual suspects’: Precarious work, informalisation & labour organisations

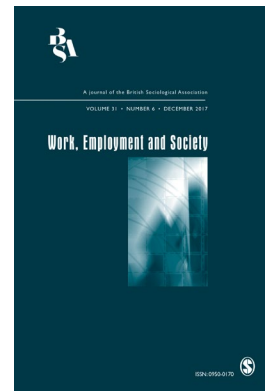
Guest Editors: Martí López-Andreu (Newcastle University), Jon Las Heras (Basque Country University), Beltrán Roca (University of Cádiz) and Davide Però (Nottingham University)
WES Editor: Prof Valeria Pulignano (KU Leuven)

Deadlines: Abstract submission deadline: 31 January 2024

Full paper submission for invited papers: 5 September 2024

An increasing body of academic literature in the sociology of work and employment has highlighted the growing patterns of precarity and informalisation in work and employment affecting both the Global North and the Global South (Alberti et al, 2018; Kalleberg, 2018; Hammer and Ness, 2021). In this context, a diversity of accounts has identified several practices and forms of labour organisations aiming to organise and mobilise precarious and informal workers (Martínez Lucio et al, 2017; Alberti and Però, 2018; Doellgast et al., 2018; Holgate, 2021). In parallel, a growing line of enquiry has focused on the organisation of workers in the gig or platform economy (Tassinari and Maccarrone, 2020; Però and Downey, 2022). In some cases, these accounts have discussed emerging and/or innovative practices and initiatives from traditional or well-established unions (Connolly et al, 2017; Meardi et al, 2021). In other cases, initiatives and campaigns developed by radical unions have been discussed (Roca and Diaz-Parra, 2017; Manki, 2018; López-Andreu, 2020). Similarly, a growing academic stream has discussed the role of ‘new’ or ‘independent’ unions representing migrant and precarious workers (Però, 2019; Aslam and Woodcock, 2020). Increasingly, the literature has tended to focus on the issue of innovative practices and the growing permeability between unions and social movements (Fairbrother and Yates, 2013; Las Heras and Ribera-Almandoz, 2017; Bailey et al., 2018). Further, it has also paid attention to the potential contradictory dynamics between institutionalisation and bureaucratisation and the role of rank-and-file in the development of inclusive participatory mechanisms (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2019).

At the same time, it has been pointed out that many discussions of the organisation of precarious workers are being characterised by ‘trade union’ fetishism (Atzeni, 2021). However, drawing mainly on examples from the Global South, some authors have started to highlight the importance of focusing more on ‘spontaneous’ forms of labour protest that often are not channeled through traditional union mechanisms (Atzeni, 2009; Ness ed. 2014; Marinaro, 2018). Further, they have also emphasized the diversity of spaces and organisational forms that labour protest can take, including stronger connections with wider social issues, social movements, community organisations and more informal organisational practices (Bieler and Nowak, 2021). These approaches provide a valuable lens to understand challenges for the organisation of precarious and



informal workers not only in the Global South but also in the Global North, where once 'secure' employment arrangements and consolidated union representation are being undermined (Baccaro and Howell, 2017).

In this context, this special issue is interested in existing practices and initiatives that have been successful in organising and mobilising precarious and informal workers – the 'unusual suspects' of labour protest – both in the Global North and the Global South. The central question of this special issue is: What are the key factors that contribute to precarious workers organizing? This includes how the informalisation of jobs affect the development of innovative union strategies and forms of precarious workers' collective practices, and how the spatial organisation of precarious jobs influences the emergence alternative forms of labour organising.

This special issue is interested in experiences that take place in different contexts and in diverse forms and spaces of labour organisation (Martinez Lucio, 2011; Las Heras and Rodriguez, 2021), involving traditional unions, radical unions, new (independent) unions, social movement unions and other forms of labour and social organisation (including spontaneous mobilisation, community unionism and the role of work centers). Importantly, the focus is on precarious and informal workers' spatial agency – the way workers collective action produces (and at the same time is produced by) diverse spatialities such as economic landscapes, scales, territories, networks, or places (Roca, 2020). We aim to explore and identify what are the distinctiveness of the politics of space of the 'unusual suspects'.

Potential topics (although not exhaustive) include:

- Consolidation and institutionalisation of rank-and-file practices in defense of precarious workers' interests
- Organic/structural transformations of 'traditional unions' in the mobilisation of precarious workers
- Tensions and possibilities between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the articulation of cohesive and unitarian trade union strategies, including community unionism initiatives
- Workers' collective response to the challenge of precarisation and deregulation in the Global North and the Global South
- Conflict and industrial action tactics during and after COVID-19 in both new and traditional precarious labour markets, e.g. platform work, domestic workers, construction, transportation, and metal workers, etc.
- Spatial determinants and the politics of space in the mobilisation of precarious workers, e.g. chokepoints, multi-scalar struggles, public and private space occupations, etc.
- Discursive and organizational tensions when articulating cross-sectoral renewal strategies and solidarity across professional, gender, ethnic, and age lines

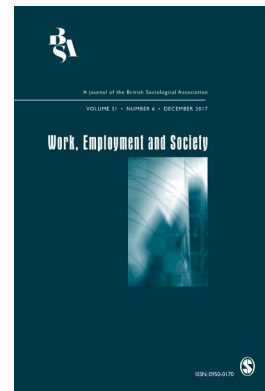
Submission instructions

The special issue welcomes research articles (10,000 words). We also welcome Book Reviews (800 words) and On the Front Line articles (5000 words). On the Front Line pieces offer a "voice to the worker" conveying sociological insight into the contemporary realities of work and employment. All On the Front Line articles can be found on the [journal's website](#) for reference.

The guest editors invite abstracts for papers along with a biographical note about the authors in the first instance. The guest editors will review the abstracts and invite a selection to submit full papers to the journal for the normal WES peer review processes. Papers selected after full peer review will be published in the special issue.

To be considered, please submit an abstract (300-400 words) and a biographical note to selina.hisir@britsoc.org.uk

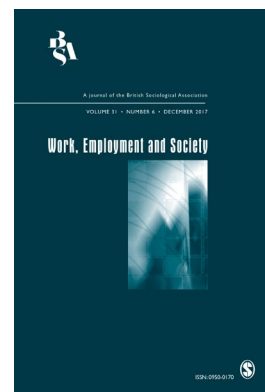
Deadline for submission of abstracts: 31 January 2024, 17:00 GMT
Notification of decisions on abstracts will be made in late February.



For further information and queries, please contact the guest editors: Dr Martí López-Andreu ([Martí.Lopez-Andreu@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:Marti.Lopez-Andreu@newcastle.ac.uk)), Dr Jon Las Heras (jon.lasheras@ehu.eus), Prof Beltran Roca (beltran.roca@uca.es), or Dr Davide Però (davide.pero@nottingham.ac.uk)

References

- Alberti G, Però D (2018) Migrating industrial relations: migrant workers' initiative within and outside trade unions. *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 56(4): 693–715.
- Alberti, G., Bessa, I., Hardy, K., Trappmann, V. and Umney, C. (2018) In, Against and Beyond Precarity: Work in Insecure Times. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(3): 447-457.
- Aslam, Y. and Woodcock, J. (2020) A History of Uber Organizing in the UK. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 119(2): 412–421.
- Atzeni, M. (2009) Searching for injustice and funding solidarity? A contribution to mobilisation theory. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40 (1): 5-16.
- Atzeni, M. (2021) Workers' organizations and the fetishism of the trade union form: toward new pathways for research on the labour movement? *Globalizations*, 18(8): 1349-1362.
- Baccaro, L. and Howell, Ch. (2017) *Trajectories of Neoliberal Transformation. European Industrial Relations since the 1970s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bailey, D., Clua-Losada, M., Huke, N. and Ribera-Almandoz, O. (2018) *Beyond Defeat and Austerity Disrupting (the Critical Political Economy of) Neoliberal Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Bieler, A. and Nowak, J. (2021) Labour conflicts in the Global South: an introduction, *Globalizations*, 18(8): 1323-1334.
- Connolly, H., Marino, S. and Martinez-Lucio, M. (2017) 'Justice for Janitors' goes Dutch: the limits and possibilities of unions' adoption of organizing in a context of regulated social partnership, *Work, Employment and Society*, 31(2): 319-335.
- Doellgast, V., Lillie, N. and Pulignano, V. (2018) *Reconstructing Solidarity: Labour Unions, Precarious Work, and the Politics of Institutional Change in Europe*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ellem, B., Goods, C., & Todd, P. (2020). Rethinking power, strategy and renewal: Members and unions in crisis. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 58(2), 424-446.
- Fairbrother, P., & Yates, C. (Eds.). (2013). *Trade unions in renewal: A comparative study*. London: Routledge
- Gallas, A. (2018). Class power and union capacities: A research note on the power resources approach. *Global Labour Journal*, 9(3).
- Gumbrell-McCormick, R., & Hyman, R. (2019). Democracy in trade unions, democracy through trade unions? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 40(1), 91-110.
- Hammer, A. and Ness, I (2021) Informal and Precarious Work: Insights from the Global South, *Journal of Labor and Society*, 24: 1-15.
- Holgate, J. (2021) *Arise: Power, Strategy and Union Resurgence*. London: Pluto Press.
- Kalleberg, A. (2018). *Precarious Lives: Job Insecurity and Well-Being in Rich Democracies*. London: Polity Press.
- Las Heras, J., & Ribera-Almandoz, O. (2017). When corporatism fails: trade union strategies and grassroots resistance to the Spanish economic crisis. *Journal of Labor and Society*, 20(4), 449-466.
- Las Heras, J., & Rodríguez, L. (2021). Striking to Renew: Basque Unions' organizing strategies and use of the strike-fund. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 59(3), 669-700.
- López-Andreu, M. (2020). Breaking fragmentation through mobilization: the development of a collective identity during Movistar's contractors' and technicians' strike in Spain. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(4), 661-677.
- Manky O (2018) Resource mobilisation and precarious workers' organisations: an analysis of the Chilean subcontracted mineworkers' unions. *Work, Employment and Society* 32(3): 581–598.
- Marinaro, P. (2018). We fight against the union!: An ethnography of labor relations in the automotive industry in Mexico. In M. Atzeni & I. Ness (Eds.), *Global perspectives on workers and labour organizations* (pp. 127–140). Springer.



- Martinez Lucio, M. (2011) From action to communication? Explaining the changing context of worker occupations as direct forms of action with reference to the case of contemporary Spain, *Employee Relations*, 33(6): 654-669.
- Martínez Lucio, M., Marino, S. and Connoll, H. (2017) "Organising as a strategy to reach precarious and marginalised workers. A review of debates on the role of the political dimension and the dilemmas of representation and solidarity." *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* 23.1 (2017): 31-46.
- Meardi, G., Simms, M. and Adam, D. (2021) Trade unions and precariat in Europe: Representative claims, *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 27:1, 41-58.
- Ness, I. ed. (2014) *New Forms of Worker Organization*. Oakland: PM Press.
- Pero, D. (2020) Indie unions, organizing and labour renewal: Learning from precarious migrant workers, *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(5): 900-918.
- Pero, D and Downey, J. (2022) Advancing workers' rights in the gig economy through discursive power: the communicative strategies of indie unions, *Work, Employment and Society*
- Roca, B. (2020). Socio-Spatial Strategies of Worker Centres: An Ethnography of Alt-Labour in NYC. *Antipode*, 52(4), 1196-1215.
- Roca, B. & Diaz Parra, I. (2017). Blurring the borders between old and new social movements: the M15 movement and the radical unions in Spain. *Mediterranean Politics*, 22(2), 218-237
- Tassinari, A. and Maccarrone, V. (2020) Riders on the storm: workplace solidarity among gig economy couriers in Italy and the UK. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34 (1). pp. 35-54.

