

Human Resource and Organization

Resistance and organized counter-resistance in conflict areas: an ethnography with Embraer's workers

*Resistência e contra-resistência-organizada em espaços de conflitos: uma etonografia com
trabalhadores da Embraer*

*Resistencia y contrarresistencia organizada en contexto de conflictos: una etnografía con empleados
de Embraer*

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Received 21 September 2015; accepted 13 June 2016

Available online 7 September 2017

Scientific Editor: Maria Sylvia Macchione Saes

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the specificity of the conflict between capital and labor in the context of a global company like EMBRAER that has a strong influence in the region where it is located in São José dos Campos in São Paulo, Brazil. Since the resignation mass held by Embraer of more than four thousand workers in 2009 intensified labor conflicts, resistance movements of workers as strikes, labor mobilizations, labor, dissatisfactions and union complaints against the company that had adopted a flexible paradigm organization. Interestingly, these areas of conflict is explained in an unprecedented way a counter-resistance organized movement of employees whose culmination was a decision contrary to the continuation of a strike erupted in 2014. It was thought until then that the counteraction to union resistance movement of workers occurred only ideologically, personal or small groups despite being beneficiaries of the shares, never participate in such movements. This time participated, managers and technicians were organized against union resistance movement in defense of the values of the company to settle with the movement and unseat union leaders seeking to address labor dissatisfaction.

In the contemplation of this study was carried out an ethnographic approach to mold a study of extended case reasoned by the Public Sociology (see Burawoy, 2005). The ethnography option was due to its ability to identify how the contemporary global capitalism processes are mediated locally with various effects on the lives of workers, a difficult reality for the foundation of an opposition unions and the left in Brazil. The research process began in the Metalworkers Union of São José dos Campos and Region and approaches with the workers of Embraer were held for two years. The main conclusion of the article points out that there is a dialectic of conflict in contemporary capitalism than the same time promoting the workers' resistance movements also reveals the effectiveness of consent policies of the typical business of post-Fordism, which in this case was manifested if as an unprecedented move against resistance-organized.

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Keywords: Resistance; Against-resistance-organized; Post-fordism; Embraer; Union

Resumo

Neste artigo, analisa-se a especificidade dos conflitos entre capital e trabalho no contexto de uma empresa global como a EMBRAER, sediada no Estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Em 2009 a EMBRAER demitiu mais de quatro mil trabalhadores, o que provocou acirramento dos conflitos

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Peer Review under the responsibility of Departamento de Administração, Faculdade de Economia, Administração e Contabilidade da Universidade de São Paulo – FEA/USP.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.rausp.2016.06.018>

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trabalhistas. Curiosamente, ao lado desses conflitos surgiu um movimento de *contra-resistência-organizada* de funcionários da empresa cujo ponto culminante foi uma decisão contrária à continuidade de uma greve eclodida em 2014. O contra o movimento de resistência sindical se posicionava em defesa dos valores da empresa. Tendo como pano de fundo esses conflitos, a pesquisa realizou uma abordagem etnográfica aos moldes de um estudo de caso ampliado fundamentado pela Sociologia Pública. A pesquisa foi realizada no Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos de São José dos Campos e Região e com os trabalhadores da Embraer durante dois anos. A conclusão principal do artigo aponta que há uma dialética do conflito no capitalismo contemporâneo que no mesmo tempo que promove os movimentos de resistência dos trabalhadores revela também a eficácia das políticas de consentimento da empresa típicas do pós-fordismo, que, neste caso, manifestou-se como um movimento inédito de *contra-resistência-organizada*.

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Palavras-chave: Resistência; Contra-resistência-organizada; Pós-fordismo; Embraer; Sindicato

Resumen

En este artículo se analiza la especificidad de los conflictos entre capital y trabajo en el marco de una empresa global como Embraer, con sede en el Estado de São Paulo, Brasil. En 2009, Embraer despidió a más de cuatro mil empleados, lo que produjo un recrudecimiento de los conflictos laborales. Curiosamente, en paralelo a estos conflictos, surgió un movimiento de contrarresistencia organizada de empleados de la empresa que tuvo como punto culminante una decisión contraria a la continuación de una huelga iniciada en 2014. A partir de dichos conflictos, se ha llevado a cabo un análisis etnográfico con base en un estudio de caso ampliado y fundamentado por la Sociología Pública. Se ha realizado el estudio en el Sindicato de Metalúrgicos de São José dos Campos y Región, y con los empleados de Embraer, durante dos años. La principal conclusión apunta hacia la existencia de una dialéctica del conflicto en el capitalismo contemporáneo que, al mismo tiempo que promueve los movimientos de resistencia de los trabajadores, revela también la eficacia de las políticas de consentimiento de la empresa, típicas del postfordismo, y que en este caso, se ha manifestado como un movimiento inédito de contrarresistencia organizada.

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Palabras clave: Resistencia; Contrarresistencia organizada; Postfordismo; Embraer; Sindicato

Introduction

Resistance movements and conflicts between labor and capital in Embraer are related to processes of privatization and restructuring that started in the 1990s. In the first phase—between 1997 and 2007—the firm experienced business and employment expansion after its restructuring, and conflicts inherent to labor relations had little public visibility. With the 2008 global financial crisis, which directly interfered with the firm's market, the logic of productive restructuring showed its darker side with the mass redundancies of workers. Embraer can be understood as a global neo-capitalist and post-Fordist firm, despite the specific conditions and peculiarities of peripheral Brazilian capitalism. In Brazil, inconclusive or peripheral Fordism moved to incomplete forms of participatory and socio-technical management (Alves, 2000; Braga, 2015), and productive restructuring strongly appeared with the intensification of globalization, labor flexibilization, and rising unemployment, especially in the 1990s.

Embraer—as well as other large national companies—began to restructure in the 1990s with the impact of the domestic market opening to international competition under the aegis of privatization policies and the reduction of state intervention. This demonstrated that Brazilian capitalism left a national and developmental perspective aside, integrating into global flexible capitalism in a subordinated and dependent manner. Embraer is a symbol of success in this process, becoming one of the most competitive companies in the global aviation industry with the production of business and high performance aircrafts, which are mainly sold on international markets.

Post-Fordist restructuring processes congregated objective aspects, such as new flexible technologies, cellular manufacturing, labor flexibilization, and reducing supply in accordance to demand, as well as subjective aspects such as teamwork, self-control, versatility, and commitment to the firm. The effects of this included disruption to the labor market and job insecurity. Post-Fordism, flexible capital accumulation, and flexible capitalism are terms that—in the critical literature—denounce the profound changes and disruptions to the labor market caused by productive restructuring, which also greatly reduces the power of unions and pressures for social and labor legislation flexibility (Antunes, 2002; Faria, 2004, 2007; Harvey, 1994; Heloani, 2003; Nogueira, 2007; Sennett, 2004; Vidal, 2013).

In Embraer, the most explicit conflicts in the field of labor and union relations arose with the firm's crisis in the international market from 2008 onwards. Its ramifications were the object of study of this article, which is based on an ethnographic case study.

In this context, metallurgical trade unionism in São José dos Campos, which is notable for its left-wing ideology, undertook radical action against so-called firm abuses. It condemned Embraer for sacrificing the workforce through cuts and redundancies, harsh negotiations on wages and working conditions, and seeking to maintain an above average return on investment for shareholders. It was therefore placed in an institutionalized conflict between labor and capital, union and firm. There was a dispute of power influence, leadership, and subjectivity over the Embraer's workers between the trade union and the firm.

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