Trade unions responses to youth unemployment in Greece

Abstract

Keywords
youth unemployment, trade unions, economic crisis

The purpose of the paper is to identify the responses of trade unions to youth unemployment in Greece. The focus of the paper will be placed on how the trade unions have dealt with the worryingly rising unemployment rates among young people emerged since the onset of the crisis (Eurostat, 2012). More specifically, the paper will identify the factors which condition the responses of trade unions in times of institutional and economic changes. The theoretical framework of the study will be based on two main factors, namely; institutional embeddedness and trade unions identities. It will also attempt to pinpoint how the different trade unions identities of the Greek trade union movement have affected their responses to youth unemployment. The two above tasks will be informed by an analysis of whether and if so why the institutional change occurred in Greece due to the crisis have affected the responses of the unions reorienting their priorities and strategies. In addition, the study will shed light on how unions have dealt with youth unemployment in terms of representing the particular interests of young workers and creating appropriate strategies and structures for promoting these interests. Thus, the study will make a first attempt to assess the effectiveness of specific strategies and structures to represent young people’s interests through an analysis of the specific actions that unions have taken to deal with specific youth employment problems.

To understand the reasons behind the differences between the trade unions’ responses in Greece and Ireland, we will use the classical ‘geometry of trade unionism’ developed by Hyman (2001). The trade unions’ politics are different in the two countries. According to Hyman, trade unions can adopt one of the following ideological directions: market, society, class. Although an interaction between these three directions is not excluded, Hyman’s geometry assumes that trade unions will adopt strategies and ideas affiliated closer with one of these identities.
From the very early stages two main tendencies emerged inside the labour movement: a social
democratic one and a communist one. Despite the domination of the social-democratic current
inside the labour movement, the existence of the communist trend paved the way for the
emergence of a class struggle discourse in the Greek trade union movement and at the same
time operated as an opposing ideological power to the ideology of national identity and
common interests (Aposolakou, 1997, p: 415). This historical feature of the Greek labour
movement has continued up to the present as social-democratic and class tendencies still
coexist inside the movement.

The data collection is based on interviews with key actors from Greek trade unions. A total
number of 8 interviews have been conducted with general secretaries, senior officers and
research officers from Greek unions (GSEE and PAME). The selection of the trade union
organizations in Greece and Ireland was based on the following criteria; The selection of GSEE is
based on the fact that it is the only national confederation in Greece and it incorporates all the
major unions and labour centres. GSEE incorporates all the major political trends within the
trade union movement, and despite disagreements, these powers participate in the social
dialogue or forms of industrial action adopted by the GSEE. The selection of PAME is based on
the fact that the communist trend within the Greek labour movement is the only one which has
officially parted ways with GSEE and has formed a new front through which industrial action is
organized. The collection of documents, reports, newspapers articles, press releases,
statements, leader’s speeches will be also employed for identifying general trends in youth
employment debates. The empirical data collected in the field work were analyzed through the
software Nvivo.
References

