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LABOUR RELATIONS IN CYPRUS:  
EMPLOYMENT, TRADE UNIONISM AND CLASS  
COMPOSITION

A thesis submitted to the  
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK  
for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
in the Faculty of Social Sciences

by

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## Abbreviations

AKEL	Progressive Party of the Working People (heir of Cyprus Communist Party)
AKP	Party of Development and Progress (governing Turkey)
CCP	Cooperative Central Bank
CMC	Cyprus Mining Corporation
CNT – FAI	Anarchosindicalist Union (Spain) – Anarchist Federation of Iberia
COLA	Cost of Living Allowance
CTP	Republican Turkish (-Cypriot) Party
DEOK	Democratic Labour Federation of Cyprus
DEV-İŞ	Revolutionary Union (Turkish Cypriot)
DIKO	Democratic Party
DISI	Democratic Rally
EAK – EKA	Cyprus (Left-wing) Farmers Union
EAM – ELAS	National Liberation Front – Popular Army (in German occupied Greece)
EDEK	Social Democratic Party
EIRO	European Industrial Relations Observatory
ETYK	Union of Bank Employees of Cyprus
EOKA	National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters
EOKA B	Paramilitary group (in and against the Republic of Cyprus)
EU	European Union
EVROKO	European Party
EXEK	Employers' union of STEK
HRM	Human Resource Management
HUR – İŞ	Democratic Union (Turkish Cypriot)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IT	Information Technology
KAMU – SEN	(Right wing) Civil Servants Union (Turkish Cypriot)
KEK	National Party of Cyprus
KKE	Communist Party of Greece
KTIBK	Union of Turkish (Cypriot) workers (federated and recognised as TURK-SEN)
MP	Member of Parliament
OELMEK	Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Secondary Education Teachers

OEB	Employers and Industrialists Federation
OLTEK	Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Secondary Technical Education Teachers
PASIDI	Pancyprian Union of civil servants
PASIXE	Pancyprian Association of Hoteliers
POAS	Pancyprian Federation of Independent Trade Unions
POED	Pancyprian Organisation of Greek (-Cypriot) Teachers
PEK	All Farmers (Right wing) Union
PSE – PEO	Pancyprian Trade Union Committee – Pancyprian Federation of Labour
SEK	Cyprus Workers' Confederation
STEK	Association of Cyprus Tourist Enterprises
TMT	Turkish (-Cypriot) Resistance Fighters
TNCs	Transnational Corporations
TRNC	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (not recognised)
TURK – SEN	Turkish (-Cypriot) Union
UBP	National Unity Party (Turkish Cypriot)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VAT	Value Added Tax
WWII	2nd World War
YTL	Turkish lira



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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of contemporary labour relations in Cyprus and is based on seven case studies: three from the hotel, two from the banking and two from the construction industries. The case studies involved particular medium and large size firms and focused on specific workplaces but some generalisations and projections are also made concerning broader tendencies in the corresponding sectors. Labour relations are approached holistically, examining both the context and the content of labour power utilisation as well as its broader impact and significance on society as a whole. The thesis focuses on employment practices and work organisation but also includes within its analytic frame, the institutional and political factors involved, management and trade unionism. The workplace is approached as a site of power relations whereby social identities and divisions occur and authority is both established and contested. Thus labour and trade union organisation is examined at the workplace level and analysed from the workers' perspective, taking into account the experience of hierarchies and resistance, and the experience of cooperation and conflict.

The study is located in a nationally specific context, situating the contemporary state of labour relations in Cyprus in the historical course of development and local particular conditions of the island. The colonial legacy, the ethnic conflict and the division of the country and the rapidity of modernisation have impacted substantially on both the industrial relations and the class structure of the society. On the other hand, international forces, trends and phenomena in the era of globalisation such as flexibility in and the deregulation of the labour market, increased capital and labour flows, neo-liberal discourses and trade union decline constitute the broader coordinates of the labour process. These facts and schemata are both examined in the light of empirical data from Cyprus and used to explore and explain issues of contemporary labour organisation and class composition.

Theoretically and politically the thesis is situated within a general Marxian framework that is informed both by the conflict school of industrial relations and the tradition of class composition studies. Workers' resistance and class conflict, the means through which class is being composed, is seen not only as a political by-product of the labour process but ontologically at its centre and conceptually at its heart. Thus the thesis also includes references to and can be used in broader discussions in and of the Left and concludes with a characterisation of the challenges and the prospects of the labour and trade union movement in Cyprus.

### **List of the case studies**

CASE STUDIES	Description
CASE STUDY 1	Medium sized hotel, non unionised
CASE STUDY 2	Medium sized hotel, semi – unionised
CASE STUDY 3	Large sized hotel, mostly unionised
CASE STUDY 4	Private bank, branch and offices workplaces
CASE STUDY 5	Cooperative Central Bank, single workplace
CASE STUDY 6	Large construction firm, unionised
CASE STUDY 7	Small construction firm, non unionised

## **Acknowledgements**

This research project would have been impossible without the active participation of hundreds of people who have offered me their time and experience. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all of my informants for their contribution in the process of this project.

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Although this research project started in 2006, its conception dates from at least two years earlier when I had finished my postgraduate studies in Political Sociology at LSE and returned to Cyprus. The idea to focus on labour on my research on Cyprus, which had already started in the form of my MSc dissertation on the politics of the division, came out of my particular discussions with Konstantinos Ioannou, Dr Andreas Panayiotou and Dr Rolandos Katsiaounis. I want to thank Konstantinos for helping me see developments from an activist perspective and from a Greek comparative framework, Andreas for pointing out the sociological and political implications of viewing Cyprus as an autonomous research field and Rolandos for helping me to situate my research project in the recent history of Cyprus.

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to his students at the University of Cyprus on labour history and the methodology of qualitative research allowing me to make my first step in the field of teaching. During the writing stage in 2009-2011, I have been discussing with Dr Murat Erdal Ilican who was also in the process of completing his PhD thesis on property and sovereignty and with Dr Andreas Panayiotou with whom I was in constant contact cooperating also for the needs of my teaching job. Murat's help was invaluable as the discussion with him allowed me not only to see things from a different thematic and epistemological perspective, that of human geography, but also to understand developments happening north of the green line, free from the bias of the Greek Cypriot media. Andreas' help was again invaluable as the discussion with him allowed me to further refine my analytical approach and contextualise more specifically my research project in the historical and contemporary field of Cyprus. I want to thank them both, not only for engaging with my work, but also for sharing with me some primary and secondary sources from their own research, also relevant to my topic of study.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: Theoretical framework, historical context and the research problem**

### 1.1. Aims, scope and rationale of the research

This thesis seeks to offer an account of the condition of the contemporary working class in Cyprus through an examination of the current labour relations system. The primary aim of this study is to document the context in which labour power is being utilised in Cyprus and analyse the process by which the working class is constituted and reproduced. More specifically the thesis aims at micro level to provide a discussion of workplace relations and dynamics and link them with broader macro level processes of labour regulation and social structuring and restructuring. The explicit intellectual aim of this exercise is to offer a description as well as an analysis of the organisation of the labour process in Cyprus, thus contributing to the international academic debates on labour and the forms it takes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The implicit political aim of this study is to illuminate the segmentations and the hierarchies within the workplace and within the labour force and most importantly the acts of individual and collective resistance in an attempt to construct a framework which can be utilised in the discussion of issues of class composition and consciousness.

Undoubtedly this thesis is analytically ambitious as it attempts to cover a series of themes that may warrant research in their own right: Employment practices, trade unionism, workplace management and class composition are to be sure inter-related topics but could have been analysed in considerable depth separately. The decision to bring them together was based on a methodological preference for a holistic approach that acknowledges the links between different economic, political and institutional arrangements and processes and prioritises the need for a conceptual framework that attempts to grasp the totality of the labour phenomenon. The perspective of the thesis is sociological: the focus is on social relations and the dialectic between agency and structure. Nevertheless some theoretical and methodological insights borrowed from other academic disciplines such as Social Anthropology, Oral History and Political Science are also incorporated in an attempt to aid and enrich the research process and its outcome.

There is a vast literature on labour relations in Britain as well as in many Western countries. A comprehensive review of the literature on labour is probably impossible even as a project of a lifetime. Labour relations and the working class have been the object of a systematic discussion since at least the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century even before the establishment of Sociology as an academic discipline and much before the autonomisation of labour studies disciplines such as

Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management (Frege, 2007). Knowledge, even within its associated academic and thematic compartmentalisation remains ultimately infinite. The inescapable material reality of my actually doing the research was however finite and specific, subject to objective constraints such as the absence of any additional means to conduct the research other than my own individual labour (funded as well as non funded) and the time frame set by the University of Warwick PhD regulations. Inevitably the end result of this five-year effort is much more limited than originally hoped for. It does offer however some new empirical data as well as some modest conclusions which can be taken up by further future empirical and theoretical research.

The most novel characteristic of this thesis is ultimately its empirical focus on Cyprus. Although a country that due to its geopolitical position as a historical cross-road has attracted much bigger attention than that warranted by its size, the academic literature on Cyprus, both local and international, rarely touches upon sociological issues, let alone the question of the labour process. The Cyprus conflict overshadows not just the social and political lives of the Cypriots but also most research on and about the island. As a person who has been born, lived and worked most of his life in Cyprus, focusing on this country made sense when choosing the topic of my PhD thesis as that puts me in the position of the insider, knowing not only the language but also significant ethnographic detail about the Cypriot society, its norms, values and culture. As a person that has also lived abroad, having had his undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the global city of London, I have been trained to see things from the position of the outsider as well, above and beyond local and parochial perspectives and ethnocentric biases. Equipped (partially at least) with both these identities, that of the insider as well as that of the outsider, I began my research on the old topic of labour in a setting that can be adequately described as a more or less uncharted territory.

## 1.2. Reviewing the main/relevant literature: theoretical and conceptual framework

### 1.2.1. The social significance of labour and the politics of labour research

The onset of capitalist modernity has essentially brought the question of labour to the political forefront. As man (human) became the centre of the Enlightenment project to understand the world, labour, that fundamental human capacity and activity was inevitably acknowledged as being

important.<sup>1</sup> The enclosure of public lands and the industrial revolution had already set in motion the processes of primitive capital accumulation, uprooting the peasants from the land and instituting private property and the wage form as dominant social relations of production. The development of the market economy and the modern (national) state which accompanied and regulated it, had brought along with them major social restructuring, essentially transforming society through the imposed commodification of land, labour and money (Polanyi, 1944). This 'great transformation' that began in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century in England and developed fully fledged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century brought about the emergence of the working class whose 'condition' was acknowledged as early as 1845 to be the '*real basis and point of departure of all social movements of the present*'.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis, more than one and a half centuries later, takes this axiomatic position put forward by Engels as its point of departure. The ontological stance assumed here is that the centrality of the proletariat in the socialist project, established both theoretically and politically in and since the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* (Marx-Engels), remains relevant today as well, despite the significant world historical changes that have altered both the process of production as well as the class structure of society. The passage from competitive market into monopoly capitalism and imperialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Lenin, 1917) and into the Keynesian welfare state of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Esping-Andersen, 1990) were to be sure significant developments which have fundamentally reshaped the capitalist system and its national and international articulations. The post-industrial globalisation of capital, neo-liberalism and trans-nationalism in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century (Sklair, 2002) again constitute significant changes in the organisational and institutional features of the world economy and society, shifting the contours and character of global production, its associated division of labour and the flows and distribution of value within and between national states. Nevertheless, although the form of capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is radically different to that of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, its fundamental character/nature, content and implications remain more or less the same. Private ownership and control of the means of production, socialisation of the productive process amidst private appropriation of its outcomes, alienation and exploitation of the workforce amidst capital accumulation and wealth concentration (Marx, 1976 [1867], 1978 [1885], 1981 [1894]) are still the basic coordinates of the global socio-economic system. Hence the core ideas of

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<sup>1</sup> As early as 1689 John Locke, in an attempt to justify the institution of private property and the emergent bourgeois socio-economic and political order, proclaimed labour to be the original source of value. In 1776, Adam Smith's study '*The Wealth of Nations*' put forward industry and the associated division of labour as the fundamental factor in the creation of wealth while David Ricardo's '*Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*' in 1817 completed the system with the embodied labour theory of value in which 'the value of commodities is determined by the quantity of labour under the most favourable circumstances'; (Clarke, 1991a; p. 17-18).

<sup>2</sup> Engels, 2005 [1845], p. 1



the critique of political economy developed by the Marxian approach, that is historical contextualisation and specificity, internal investigation and deconstruction of abstracted and generalised categories, standpoint and positionality determining the explanatory perspective, and practice-oriented theoretical engagement are seen as continuing to have analytic utility and political validity in the study of capitalism in general and particularly in this study.

Although the position one occupies in the labour process and type of work one performs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is commonly considered today to be a less significant parameter in the construction of social class identity than it used to be in the past, and even the concept of the 'social class' is often considered as outmoded, difficult to define and with questionable analytic and political significance, the focus of this thesis attempts to counter the discounting and ignoring of the concepts of labour and social class from contemporary social science. Work is still an extremely important dimension of human life, taking up most of our daily time, constituting the primary means of our subsistence and to a great extent shaping our social relations and networks (Colling and Terry, 2010 p. 5-6). The division of labour and most importantly the divisions within labour constitute a fundamental dimension and an inevitable starting point for any attempt to study the divisions in society as a whole. And the hierarchies, power differentials and power conflicts at work are illustrative of broader processes of structuring and restructuring of economic actors and social and political institutions. The focus on the organisational forms of and within the labour process can illuminate broader patterns as well as specific aspects of the social organisation and offer insights on the articulation of contemporary social relations.

Any attempt to analyse the contemporary labour process needs to take into account the historical developments that have shaped it. More so if (and since this) research aims to be forward looking, pointing that is into the future, or at least constructing a basis that can be utilised in order to make some projections into the future of the labour process. In fact, situating the analysis in its historical context and examining contemporary forms in terms of the process of their construction as well as the potentiality of their re-construction, recognising that is the inherent dynamic of development, is probably one of the most important strengths and contributions of the Marxian method to the social sciences (Hobsbawm, 1998). Employment practices and work organisation, labour relations regimes in general are shaped by factors such as the institutional framework, the political system and its internal balance of power, the pattern of economic development and not least the socio-cultural realm and its associated norms, values and world-views. These factors are general and international in our globalisation age, which is characterised by increased flows of information, interaction and

influence across the borders and is bringing about the destruction of realities and conceptions of national uniqueness. Nevertheless, the articulation of the above factors which constitutes the coordinates of labour relations, remains nationally and locally specific.<sup>3</sup> Current labour relations regimes are effectively products of previous labour regimes, previous struggles and previous political and socio-economic compromises. Thus the preceding labour struggles shape the form and construct the field for the contemporary and future ones. What I am interested in, however, in this thesis is not the history of the labour movement in Cyprus *per se* but rather its condition and its political implications for the present. Thus I restrict the references to the past as far as possible and attempt to gather most of them in this first chapter (1.3).

### 1.2.2. Employment and workplace relations

The concept of employment refers to the social relationship under the terms of which labour is provided in exchange for money. The employment relation is by definition unequal (Colling and Terry, 2010, p. 8) or asymmetrical in terms of power as it brings together, on the one hand, ownership and control of the means of production and, on the other hand, labour power and means of subsistence. The concept of work refers to the actual process whereby the inherently asymmetrical employment relation is realised. This power differential however is not a static or given phenomenon. It is both a context and an outcome of an on-going dialectic of cooperation and conflict, a dynamic instantiation of coercion and consent as a result of everyday work and its management (Colling and Terry, 2010, pp. 8-9). The power of the employer needs to be demonstrated continuously, on an everyday level through the act of the management and occasionally through the intervention, symbolic or real, by the employer or the group or the association of employers. At the same time the workers are not simply the weak victims or the recipients of disciplinary and control power. They are active agents shaping to a certain extent the patterns of the labour process, the limits of employers' and managers' authority and through their formal and informal associations they can influence both the rate of their remuneration and even in certain cases the internal organisation of the firm – programme, promotions, divisions of labour, etc..

The workplace is not only a field of production but also effectively a field of social interaction, power struggle and societal reproduction. It is a field where actors assume and play out different

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<sup>3</sup> According to Carola Frege (2007), the national context, historical as well as institutional, creates 'path dependencies' and 'state traditions' and thus influences and shapes not only employment regimes but also the research about them.

roles requiring different behavioural patterns and the development of different technical and social skills in the process of value production and its social circulation (Gabriel, 1988). The divisions within the workplace are sometimes clear, sometimes blurred but always definite at moments of crisis or moments of restructuring which may act as transformative or turning points in the history of the firm, the sector or even the national economy as a whole. At the same time the workplace is not a bounded or closed system, but subject to a wider set of influences and forces from actors that arise above and beyond the specific conditions of an individual and/or a collectivity of workplaces. The legislative framework, government policy, social pacts between the social partners, management techniques and managerial philosophies in general, trade union activity and inactivity, strategy and tactics are important determinants of actual workplace life.

The discipline of Industrial Relations, the social science study that is of employment and work, whether perceived as a system (Dunlop, 1993 [1958]) or as a process (Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998) is more or less oriented on the macro level when analysing the actors and their relationships. The common themes that attract the attention of researchers in this field are trade unions and collective bargaining (Clegg, 1976; Sisson, 1987), or more recently the industrial relations institutions and the regulatory framework (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003; Howell, 2005), and re-structuring and innovation in terms of organisation and management (Vallas eds, 2001; Garibaldo and Telljohann eds, 2007). Although such works are useful in setting certain theoretical coordinates and proposing a specified empirical research agenda that can be not only useful in illuminating the parameters of workplace life but also potentially inter-disciplinary and relevant for example to other fields such as economics and management, they often tend to miss or underplay other micro level processes which are also vital in constructing a holistic perspective on labour. To be sure this is also a matter of methodological approach and choice of sources and forms of data collection. However it is also a matter of ontological and political stance, which defines or directs the thematic focus, scope and prioritisation of the different aspects, dimensions and levels of the labour phenomenon.<sup>4</sup>

The general decline of trade unionism and collective bargaining since the 1980s, the globalisation process and the neo-liberal and managerial offensive in the 1990s have undoubtedly shaped not only the labour process and the labour market but also research in the field. It is not just the strengthening of the Human Resource Management approach vis-à-vis the Industrial Relations approach resulting in the underplay of employment relations and conflict from the research focus

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<sup>4</sup> John Kelly's comment in 1998 (p. 129) about labour research in Britain in the 1980s and 1990s is particularly sharp. 'Quite why researchers should have proved so eager to write about 'human resource management' rather than employer authoritarianism is an interesting question in its own right'.

(Frege, 2007 p. 26) or in the enhanced role of personnel specialists in the workplace (Guest and Bryson, 2009) but also the increased role of the law and the market in the regulation of the workplace (Dickens and Hall, 2009; Colling, 2010, Arrowsmith, 2010). Furthermore, it is the broader restructuring of the global economy, bringing about not only the concentration of capital and resources in the form of TNCs experienced locally as foreign ownership but also the opening up of national economies with the movement of both capital and labour and increased competitive pressures for enhanced productivity and improved economic outcomes, which makes trade union activity more difficult while also narrowing its scope. Competitiveness, productive efficiency and product quality become the general catch words as states and firms set the context not only of labour organisation but also of public discourse about it, imposing that is the limits within which the forces of labour can argue and act. In the shadow of the demise of trade unionism appeared the need and search for new actors in industrial relations (Heery and Frege, 2006; Wills, 2009), new forms of employee representation and voice within and without the workplace (Charlwood and Forth, 2009; Willman, Gomez and Bryson, 2009; Terry, 2010) and a new interest in worker experience and subjectivity, including coping strategies and health condition (Lewchuk, Clarke and Wolff, 2008; Deery, Iverson and Walsh, 2010).

The increased migratory flows of the global economy have also brought about or facilitated the expansion of non-standard, informal and semi-legal employment across many industries. Short term work arrangements, piece work and undeclared work, atypical employment and exclusion from labour rights deriving both from the legal as well as the collective bargaining system constitute the changing context of labour in the new network society. Subcontracting and informal labour emerge as overtly significant dimensions in shaping the work environment and the experience of increasing sections of the working class and thus structuring the dialectic of exploitation and resistance in the new globalised economy (Scierup, 2007 [2006]; Slavnic, 2007; Wills, 2009). Standard, or typical employment is seen to be shrinking while the conception of the life job becomes less relevant and often a non-option for most young entrants into the labour market. The ‘flexibility’ and the ‘labour market segmentation’ theses (Piore and Sabel, 1984; Harvey, 1989; Casey, Metcalf and Millward, 1997; Standing, 1999) as well as the ‘intensification’ and ‘generalised insecurity’ theses (Pollert, 1988; Gallie, White, Yan and Tomlinson, 1998; Heery and Salmon eds., 1999; Burchell, Lapido and Wilkinson, 2002) were developed as attempts to account for the transformation of the labour process and its impacts, grasping them as part of broader changes in the organisation of production and the patterns of the global economy.

Flexibility is ultimately a very open notion whose theoretical definition, the extent of its empirical identification and most importantly its practical interpretation for the purposes of policies and politics has been and still is disputed. The boundary between its positive and its normative dimension has always been fluid and shifting while its scope, focus and meaning, let alone purpose and implication, has been a matter of debate. Nevertheless at a considerable level of generality the concept refers to a new organising principle of production (Piore and Sabel, 1984) and a new accumulation regime (Harvey, 1989) that is seen as a paradigm shift away from Fordist rigidities into post-Fordist fluidities (Vallas, 1999). Flexibility has multiple dimensions affecting both the employment relation and the work act (Beck 1992 [1986]) – determining both the numerical composition of the workforce, the total working time and its distribution as well as issues of task assignment and remuneration. Its implication is seen as the segmentation of the labour market both externally and internally into a core and a periphery, increasing the distance between skilled and unskilled work, well paid and badly paid jobs, permanent and casual employment. More importantly flexibility is not only or yet a general condition but also and primarily a general tendency (Felstead and Jewson eds, 1999). Therefore it is more suitable to refer to flexibilisation as a dynamic situation, in the process of which managerial policy and labour organisation is undergoing change.

By the late 1990s the notion of flexibility had become established and included as part of the general neo-liberal consensus with national and EU governments and business circles attempting to realise the strategy of the ‘flexible labour market’<sup>5</sup> through processes of deregulation (Kouzis, 2001) and re-regulation (Rubery and Grimshaw, 2003). However the fear of the implications of the promotion of flexibility in labour on workers' security, actual as well as potential, was evident from the beginning. Richard Sennet (1998) argued that the short-termist character of contemporary employment brings illegibility and loss of coherent biographical narrative, superficiality of involvements and erosion of trust, leading to the corrosion of character. Among radical academics and activists, the concept of ‘precarity’ as a life condition or a new norm of work life re-emerged with a double edge – theoretical as well as political – in an attempt to both understand as well as subvert the flexibility discourse.<sup>6</sup> The attempt to reclaim flexibility from capital and take into

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<sup>5</sup> International developments reached Cyprus, which was already in the process of joining the EU. In the ‘Joint assessment of employment policy priorities in Cyprus’ by the Government of Cyprus and the European Commission, signed on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2001 ‘flexibility’ constitutes the basic guideline.

<sup>6</sup> The origins of this attempt lie in Italy at the turn of the century but by 2004 an international network had emerged which issued a declaration in Middlesex in the context of the alternative London Social Forum. On a more personal note this was also the beginning of my focus on labour which led me two years later to start work on a PhD thesis. Now the end of this thesis coincides with the publication of Guy Standing's last book (2011) about the precariat.

account workers' need for security led Italian academics and activists to put forward the idea of 'guaranteed basic income' (Fumagalli, 2005). Meanwhile in Denmark the idea of flexicurity was developed along the lines of state intervention to improve the efficiency of labour mobility, adjusting labour force skills to economic needs and facilitating the smooth transition from one occupation to the other (Wilthagen, 1998, Wilthagen and Tross, 2004). By 2007 this notion became EU policy (EU Commission, 2007).

The focus on labour flexibility and precarity in the research and politics agendas of the last decade did not come alone. It came along with a new interest in gender and its role in the structuring of the work and employment relation. This took many forms such as the focus on the interplay of emotion and sexuality at work (Adkins, 1996; Taylor and Tyler, 2000), the re-examination of more traditional themes such as male bread winning ideologies (Charles and James, 2003) and the lower cost of female labour (Rubery, 2006) as well as the childcare needs and identity projects of women (Casey and Alach, 2004). There is a specifically gendered dimension of insecurity in employment and work and this is evident as soon as the research focus falls on the subjective experience of women, especially immigrants (Purcell, 2000; Anthias 2000; Parrenas, 2001, Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich, 2003). Flexible work arrangements are generally taken to be both a condition and a choice for women, sometimes originating from employers' preferences but sometimes also from women employee needs. The form and the functionality of flexibility may vary and cannot be deduced theoretically and *a priori*, remaining ultimately an empirical question.

The issue of power and control over the process of labour in general and the relations within the workplace in particular remains central amidst the increased complexity that characterises the post Fordist era. Today managerial power is not merely an outcome of the separation of conception from execution of the work task (Braverman, 1974) nor can it be fully analysed by means of the typology of simple, technical and bureaucratic control (Edwards, 1979). In the current post industrial conditions of decentralisation and informality and increased socialisation, hierarchy and conflict are also instituted and substantiated on the basis of other dimensions such as communicative and social skills, group dynamics and networking within and without the workplace. The general servicisation of the economy and the subsequent replacement of the 'mass worker' by the 'social worker' has neither eradicated the factory logic nor has it abolished the antagonism that is inherent in it (Negri, 1988). Some claim that it has not even challenged the fundamentals of Taylorism such as overtly scripted and routinised acts and interactions, rehearsed time and time again (Ritzer, 2004 [1996]). Yet at the same time the increased interpenetration of production imperatives by consumption

logics, preferences and actors beyond the mere size of demand, has however altered the contours of the dialectical conflict between labour autonomy and capitalist control. The idea of a 'customer oriented bureaucracy' linking both workers' empowerment and capitalist rationalisation (Korczynski, 2002) or the notion of the 'triadic work relation' (Lucas, 2004) emerged precisely as attempts to expand the scope of analysis, to take into account the new service logic (and customer presence), into the labour process.

### 1.2.3. Trade unionism and the labour force

Trade unionism is a complex phenomenon situated ultimately and inevitably at the heart of labour relations. Trade unionism starts from the recognition of the inherent collectivism of the workplace and the labour process and attempts to build organisational structures and articulate a political voice in order to promote the interests of the collective labourer. Both historically and in contemporary times, trade unions found and find themselves in between different spheres having to follow different logics and be bound by different imperatives (Offe, 1985). Hyman's (2001) typology of European unionism is very useful in illuminating the fundamentally different roles trade unions assume and the often contradictory rationales under which they operate. As economic actors they have to regulate the labour market, control the supply of labour and achieve material gains for the labourers. As class actors they have to lead the struggle politically and contest the system, while simultaneously as civil society organisations they have to assume the role of the stake holder and pursue social dialogue and compromise with the representatives of capital and the state.

Trade unionism assumes different patterns in different national settings (Hyman, 2001; Frege, 2007) and different historical periods (Heery and Kelly, 1994; Howell, 2005). The different routes taken, or better the different political culture and habitual practice of trade unions at different time and places depends on multiple factors such as the state of the economy, the norms and values of society, the form and internal balances of the political system and the levels of social conflict within and without the workplace. Material and ideological conditions, that is, that are shaped by previous historical developments, determine the structure, the orientation and the practices of trade unions. Although overt generalisations carry the danger of leading the analyst into schematic thinking and stereotyping, it might be useful to see business unionism as associated with an individualistic world-view and a monetary culture and a product of strong economies in the attempt to analyse how this became dominant in the UK and more so in the US. To see the welfare state tradition of Germany and the reformist, integrative approach of post WWII Western Social Democracy in

particular and the anti-communist climate in the West more generally, as contributing substantially to the predominance of 'social market' and 'social partnership' politics among the German trade union movement. In Italy, on the other hand, the weaker economy, the more bitter conflicts and the strength of the communist movement probably played a role in class unionism becoming dominant.

Trade unions do not operate in an institutional vacuum but in a certain industrial relations system – often they have a significant role in the construction of that system and an even more important one in its reproduction. Industrial relations systems may vary both in terms of their rationale of operation and in terms of the means that are employed in order to achieve the generally accepted outcomes – economic prosperity and social peace. However, no typology can do justice to the description and analysis of industrial relations systems as elements from one inter-penetrate the other and in reality beyond the theoretical models there exists no 'pure' form. Nevertheless as far as the procedures and practices of labour macro management are concerned, at least three different systems can be said to exist, differing from each other with respect to the degree and form of involvement by national law and state practice in the labour affairs. On the one hand, is the voluntarist system whereby labour relations are regulated by 'free collective bargaining' with the state restricting itself to a supporting and mediating role, offering the institutional framework and political facilitation but abstaining from acts of legislative intervention and political arbitration except in extreme cases. This system is the traditional British model, between market and class in Hyman's (2001) terms or collective *laissez faire* in Howell's (2005) terms, and is based on strong trade unions that are able to both organise the workforce and represent its economic interests vis-à-vis capital, achieving both recognition and a place at the negotiating table through their *de facto* power. Voluntarism is based on the idea of the balance of forces between labour and capital that make the self restraint and the mutual understanding amongst employers' organisations and trade unions possible, desirable and achievable. Whether at national or regional, sectoral or local workplace level, the voluntarist system has collective bargaining and collective agreement as its fundamental characteristic, primary regulatory mechanism as well as a dominant ideological framework which can accommodate both conflict and consent. The French system on the other hand, in opposition to the traditional British system of voluntarism, has state intervention and legislation as the primary regulatory means and inevitably is more prone to the politicisation of industrial conflict. The forces of organised labour and the Left in France have no hesitation to use the law as an instrument of struggle in order to secure rights and benefits and ensure the enforcement of collective agreements (Goetschy and Jobert, 2004 p. 186). The state thus becomes an active agent in labour affairs, beyond the mere provision of a legal-institutional framework, in



two ways – both as a site of political struggle about and as an agent of policy in the shaping of national industrial relations. The German model of the welfarist ‘social market’ philosophy (Hyman, 2001) and the ‘co-determination’ procedures of industrial democracy or workers’ participation in management (Keller, 2004) lies in between the voluntarist and the statist systems of industrial relations. This is because it both recognises the autonomy of the labour market and the labour process while simultaneously it integrates their regulation within the state form. The concept of social partnership which is dominant today in EU labour relations discourse is of German origin (Hyman, 2001, p.47) while the contemporary European tendency towards the juridification of labour affairs has also been historically a fundamental attribute of the German industrial relations system.

The organisational structure of trade unionism again differs from country to country and from one historical era to the other. If one was to construct a schematic typology of ‘pure’ trade union organisational forms, one would probably distinguish between craft, industrial and general trade unionism, viewing them as corresponding to three consecutive eras – from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Nevertheless neither typologies nor periodisations can do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon and its hybrid forms and rationales. Trade unionism emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as a response to the proletarianisation process that characterised the passage of society into modernity. It was a primarily skilled workers’ movement organised on a craft basis.<sup>7</sup> From the beginning, however, broader and more inclusive organisational forms were needed, propagated and instituted. Industrial unionism, bringing together all the workers of each industry, both skilled and unskilled, was seen as a superior structure, more progressive and just and more effective at both the economic and the political fronts. By the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the logic of industrial organisation had prevailed. Industrial organisation however, that is not effectively coordinated and politically united at the level of national economy could and did lead to similar problems as those that plagued craft unionism. That is narrow conceptions of economic interests, sectoral parochialism and inability to articulate a unified and systematic class viewpoint regarding socio-economic policy in general and labour issues in particular continued to trouble the socialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Moreover the 2<sup>nd</sup> international split of the labour movement after the Bolshevik revolution<sup>8</sup> and the appearance and strengthening of

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<sup>7</sup> Although this organisational form brings to mind pre-modern or early modern artisan forms and guild organisational rationales, craft trade unionism is an essentially modern phenomenon because of the capitalist socio-economic context in which it appeared and operated (industrialisation, labour market, wage form etc.) and because of the mass movement and representational role it assumed.

<sup>8</sup> The first political split of the labour movement was that between social-democrats and anarcho-syndicalists in the 1870s while the second one was between socialists and communists in the 1920s.

centrist and conservative trade unions (liberal, nationalist and/or Christian) segmented ideologically and politically as well the structure and practice of trade unionism.

Collective bargaining is the basic attribute of trade unionism as it constitutes the means by which workers via their trade union representatives can have a say in the labour process in general and the terms of their employment and the conditions of their work in particular. Collective bargaining is central in all industrial relations systems, although the level at which this happens, the form it takes, the scope it has, the procedural and legal frameworks in which it occurs differ again from country to country and from era to era. Some even claim that collective bargaining processes are 'the regulation of labour' and subsume and structure trade unionism itself and that they should be at the centre of the attempt to theorise trade unionism (Clegg, 1976). Sisson (1987) takes up this route and examines how collective bargaining is managed in practice in an attempt to explain the decentralisation process under way in Britain and the appearance of single-employer bargaining in certain industries. His comparative study points out both the essentially voluntary form of collective bargaining institutions and the contingency of employers' preferences of the bargaining level and the degree of centralisation in the process. It does make sense to focus on collective bargaining when one attempts to construct a theoretical framework for industrial relations; nevertheless in the current conditions of trade union decline and individualisation of labour relations, an explicit focus on collective bargaining can at best give a very partial view of the labour process and at worst underplay other dimensions of trade union activity and ignore other forms of labour regulation and deregulation.

#### 1.2.4. Class and class struggle

As already mentioned above, this thesis starts from the Marxian premise of the class division being the central characteristic of modern capitalist societies and class struggle being the basic motor of history or better the means whereby historical change is effected. Having said that I need to shift the analytic focus to the forms of class division and the patterns of class composition as well as the instances of class struggle at various and multiple levels and its outcomes. Class struggle is simultaneously an economic and political struggle, affecting not only the rate of exploitation but also its context and form. It is both about the social price of labour as well as the conditions of labour power utilisation. More importantly it is a struggle that is waged both within and without the workplace, in organised as well as unorganised ways, individually as well as collectively, consciously as well as unconsciously. While it is generally accepted that mass strikes constitute

‘class war’, or moments of ‘social antagonism’ other more elemental and everyday incidences of immediate resistance to managerial authority or workers' action against work and capital are either un-noticed or relegated to the realm of insignificance.

Although organisation is considered to be the basic resource of the working class in its struggle against capital, allowing it not only to mobilise itself in order to defend its economic interests but also to contest politically the dominance of capital, the appropriate form of this organisation has troubled the socialist movement from its inception (Franzosi, 1995 p. 136). Lenin's (2002 [1902]) conception of the inherent inability of the trade unions to inculcate and develop a political revolutionary consciousness amongst their members, rendering the primacy of the vanguard party both a necessity and a priority, has been more or less an accepted fact in the socialist tradition until the appearance of the New Left of the 1960s and especially the Italian autonomist movement of the 1970s. Even anarcho-syndicalist movements, which formally rejected ‘party vanguardism’ in favour of ‘revolutionary unionism’, in terms of actual political content and in the unfolding of historical action, were led to think and act in a quasi-Leninist fashion, the prime example here being the Spanish CNT-FAI in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> Trade unions were seen as the middle layer, linking the class to the party, both acting as a membership pool and as the transmission belt for the propagation of ideas and policies from the socialist leadership to proletarian masses.

Kelly's (1998) focus on workers' mobilisation and collective action as the central dimension of industrial relations links the concepts of struggle and organisation and addresses the theoretical and political question of class conflict. The notion of ‘justice’ is suggested as the central theme determining militancy and the issue of leadership is addressed from below and at the micro-level as well. Activists, especially left-wingers, have been and remain the key factor in workers' mobilisations by pointing out injustice and the need for action, contributing to the formation of group identity and defending the legitimacy of collective action (Kelly, 1998 p. 35, 44-51). Within the trade union structures and the various workplace committees of different sorts, militant communists, whether characterised as working class heroes or trouble-makers according to one's perspective, were more or less seen as the local leaders and agitators, stirring up industrial unrest

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<sup>9</sup> This is not just because of the actual CNT-FAI's entry into the Republican Government led by Largo Caballero in 1936 but more generally about the crystallisation of an anarchist core within the broader workers' movement. The Spanish anarcho-syndicalists in their revolutionary practice were led to accept *de facto* and act in the terms of, not only ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’ but also the ‘vanguard party’ in military, economic as well as political issues. Although this was never officially and formally accepted, there were voices which did not shy away from seeing FAI as the political and ideological wing of CNT (Christie, 1996). And this includes both anarcho-syndicalist tendencies, the reformist one emphasising ‘anti-fascist unity’ (which had prevailed) but also the radical one that was calling for ‘a revolutionary junta’ (Leval, 1975; Oliver, 2000)

and coding politically workers' discontent and grievances. Often these militants, whether inside the official communist movement or in the last decades radicals outside it, constituted *a priori* targets for employers' authoritarianism and repression (Franzosi 1995 p. 220) in the more or less conservative, anti-communist climate of the Cold War era and its post Cold War continuation and diffusion.

Organised and political class struggle remains essentially the only way in which capital's power can be challenged systematically and substantially. This is because organisation and politicisation can achieve two necessary conditions for raising the working class beyond its objective position and orientation, a class in itself 'as against capital', to the level of consciousness, becoming a class 'for itself'. (Lukacs, 1968 [1920] p. 76). Organisation and politicisation can theoretically and potentially achieve unification at two levels – both overcoming the socio-cultural divisions (mental from manual labour, gender and ethnicity etc) and transcending the socio-economic hierarchies (based on occupational position) within the working class. Effective class unity, especially if it manages to neutralise the special role assigned by capital to the managerial and technical stratum, may lead to the achievement of class autonomy, breaking in other words the reproduction of capital which is based on the subordination of the collective labourer through the integration of labour regulation within the production process and the multi-segmentation of the labour force (Clarke, 1991b p. 191).

Nevertheless the primacy of organised and political struggle need not overshadow the less glorious instances of workplace conflict which is not only a more frequent phenomenon but often can and have developed into more generalised struggles. The analyst should not forget that a significant proportion of strike activity is not organised and not officially sanctioned let alone instigated or led from the outside or from above. Wildcat strikes are seen as immature forms of struggle, spontaneous outbursts against exploitation and repression which might be heroic but essentially hardly able to win anything practical and have a longer term impact. Their un-mediated form, their almost existential character and their anti-authoritarian implications are usually cited by radicals as signs of class autonomy and self-realisation, while their political weakness due to the lack of strategy and planning and their ineffectiveness are usually cited by reformists and pragmatists who frown upon them and professional trade unionists who are threatened by them. Often the dichotomy between a union-led and a non-union-led strike is not as stark as it seems. This is because some official union strikes start really unofficially, often forcing the trade union leadership to join in and some unofficial non-union strikes may have tacit union approval of unionists and/or eventually lead

to unionisation.

At the micro workplace level, workers' resistance is not always collective and need not always reach the threshold of industrial action. It might also take indirect and subversive forms that are of a more elemental nature. Just as at the macro level of sectoral and national collective bargaining, strike action or non-cooperation can be also used as a threat, or in more subtle ways as potentialities. Grievances concerning the time, the pace or the conditions of work might be satisfied or repressed immediately and locally before being fully and systematically articulated and taken up to the trade union or the firm's management. It is probably futile to try to estimate the threshold at which discontent leads to industrial action or construct models in order to explain the incidence and measure the intensity of class struggle (Franzosi, 1995) while models of long waves of mobilisation (Kelly, 1998) can be useful theoretical exercises but carry the danger of determinism and historicism, missing the inherent historicity and empirical specificity of class struggle. Conflict at work, just as in society as a whole, takes different forms and neither its occurrence nor its implications can be explained at the level of theory. Class and the class struggle which shapes it remain at the end of the day historical phenomena that cannot be grasped adequately with sociological nets.<sup>10</sup>

### **1.3. Reviewing the main/relevant literature: historical context**

#### **1.3.1. Conceptualising the modernisation process**

Although the process of the incorporation of Cyprus – as part of the eastern Mediterranean – into the capitalist world economy can be seen as beginning as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Wallerstein, 1989), capital's complete domination at the local level only materialised in the last decades of British rule. The predominance of the wage relation in the productive process, the institutionalisation of bureaucracy and centralised administration and the political separation on the basis of ideology and ethnicity were the three major coordinates of the transition to capitalist modernity, which was completed in 1960 with the creation of the Cypriot state (Ioannou, 2006). The late colonial period has essentially set the overall context, in multiple ways, in which historical progress has unfolded in the period of independence and partition and it is still significantly relevant for the analyses of contemporary social and political structures.

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<sup>10</sup> 'Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and in the end this is its only definition'. (E. P. Thompson, 1963, Preface p. 10).

Attalides (1981) comprehends this development as the economic and political transformation of Cypriot society. In these terms, the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, beginning in the 1920s, were accelerated and intensified in the period 1945-60 and resulted in the intensification of the decline of agriculture and in the establishment of the authority of the town over the country. Through the anthropological lense of Loizos (2001 [1985]), the process of social restructuring is posited in a nexus of conflict relations. With this frame, modernisation provoked the erosion of traditional patriarchy through the establishment of the nuclear family and transformed the traditional relations of authority through the development of technology and mass education. Katsiaounis (1996, 2000) focuses on the political dimension and the roots of the social transition and in the relations of various social groups with the colonial authority. This approach reveals the anticolonial orientation of the popular movement, as expressed through the class and national liberation conflict which culminated in the second half of the 1940s.

Bryant (2004) focuses on the cultures of nationalism in Cyprus and sees the role of education and publicity as fundamental in the construction of the national communities and thus the active participation of the people into modernity. In this approach, the hegemony of nationalism upon which ethnic division and conflict followed later, appears to a significant extent the inevitable product of the modernisation project. Erdal (2011) conceptualises the transition into modernity as distorted and the dominance of nationalism as a byproduct in a larger material process involving the competition of elites for economic and political power in a changing context. In this framework and using property and land rights as the main focus, the shifting legal and political patterns are seen as engineering social relations in the bigger contest for sovereignty and authority. Panayiotou (1999, 2006) takes a more sociological approach to modernisation, that attempts to illuminate the cultural composition of the Cypriot leftist subculture, through the historical borderline experience of international and local class influences and conflicts. With this lens, the leftist networks express at the local level the political and cultural reaction and resistance to the deepening of the capitalist relation and to the imposition of hegemonic ideology – colonial as well as nationalist.

Christodoulou (1992), accepting the term ‘Cypriot miracle’ that was coined by the Greek-Cypriot bourgeoisie in its attempt to describe the rapid economic development of its state, leads us ‘inside’ the miracle with detailed historical references to the political and economic factors of this ‘development’. He refers to the ‘progress of labour’ and the ‘improved organisation’ and ‘socio-economic uplifting’ of the working class in the context of the tripartite system. *‘The essence of the*

*Cypriot “miracle” is demonstrated also by the fact that within three years after the invasion, full employment was achieved...’.* However the ‘patience of Sisyphus’ and the ‘ant-like quality of work’ that constitute the ‘temper of the people’ (Christodoulou, 1992) have limited explanatory power. From a Marxist perspective, Panayiotopoulos (1995) posits the material constituent terms of the Greek-Cypriot developmental state in the second proletarianisation wave that came with the displacement of the Greek Cypriots from the northern part of the island. According to this perspective it was the separation of the farmers from their land that allowed the primitive capital accumulation of the post 1974 ‘developmental state’ and it was the disproportional sacrifice of the working class that brought about the ‘economic miracle’. Kattos's (1999) thesis, taking a different starting point (and utilising a North European comparative framework) refers to the lack of ideological, sectoral and political unity within the Cypriot working class, which prevents it from being able to shape and control the process of development. Although true, his analysis is however of limited utility as he conceives the working class as a pre-political force which has only trade-union consciousness and is thus unable to articulate its own paradigm for the pattern of Cyprus' development.

Before evaluating, however, the current condition and politics of the working class in Cyprus and its role in the broader process of development, it is essential to examine more closely its formation and growth as well as the institutional framework in which it is located. A historical analysis is needed before any systematic attempt to discuss contemporary issues of class composition and consciousness. This is expected to situate the emergent working class in the broader social restructuring and political environment of the late colonial as well as the independence era.

### 1.3.2. The formation of the Cypriot working class

Proletarianisation, as the extension of the wage relation in the productive process, constitutes not simply an economic but also a sociopolitical development. The material condition and the experience of proletarianisation as a historical process caused the class restructuring which created the working class of the towns and the mines (Katsiaounis, 1996, 2000; Panayiotou, 1999). The first wave of the proletarianisation process in Cyprus occurred in the inter-war period. This was imposed through the expropriation of the smallholding peasantry in the hands of the money lenders. *‘The money lender as a general rule starts his career as a small grocer in the village selling several commodities on credit and in return receives as payment or part payment the produce of his clients at a price fixed by him. When he succeeds in building up some capital, he begins to lend cash to the*

*farmers and in the course of time he becomes their master. As long as the position of the borrower does not deteriorate, the loans run indefinitely with the main object of putting him further in debt and eventually forcing him to sell his land at a low price'* (Colonial report: Rural welfare in Cyprus 1380/1955).

The basic characteristic and consequence of this process was the declining importance of farm land as an infrastructure for the family, and its replacement by the wage (Loizos, 2001 [1975]). The development of the mining industry in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was a key moment in the history of Cyprus as it introduced the mass context in the labour process and it linked directly the Cypriot labour market with the global mining product markets. The mining industry was at the heart of Cyprus's industrialisation and can be conceptualised as its central dimension (Panayiotou, 1999). The establishment of the capitalist relation was completed in the 1940s through the expansion of military and public works, which completed the monetarisation process and the imposition of the law of value in the Cypriot countryside. Capitalist development however, was neither a consensual nor a smooth process. The local resistance to capital was expressed through the cooperative and trade union movements, which were constituted simultaneously both as a defence and as a proposal of the farmers and the workers with respect to and against the form of development. These same military and public works that signalled the final predominance of the waged form of labour, constituted simultaneously an aspect of the Keynesian compromise, which included and accepted the working class into the state through the political regulation of the market (Ioannou, 2006).

Class conflict was expressed in the 1920s and 1930s through the struggles for the limitation of working time and the improvement of working conditions. Strikes were often spontaneous and relatively frequent, giving the opportunity to the communist militants<sup>11</sup> to expand their agitational and organisational activity. The most important strikes took place in 1927 and 1929 in Amiantos mines with the participation of thousands of workers who managed to gain the nine-hour working day. Often the strikers clashed with the colonial police and there were often victims and usually many injured and many arrested.<sup>12</sup> In the 1936 miner strikes, the colonial authorities had to use the army in order to force the workers to return to work. Turkish Cypriots usually participated in the

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<sup>11</sup> The Communist Party of Cyprus was established on a national basis in 1926 as the successor of the Labour Party founded a couple of years earlier in Limassol. For the history of its formation see Lefkis, 1984 and Panayiotou, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Some were also exiled from the mining areas which were largely considered as the fief of the Cyprus Mining Corporation (CMC), a U.S.A. - based multinational corporation. For the history of CMC see Lavender, Mant and Canther, (1962) and from the miners' perspective and experience see Varnavas's books 1988, 1990, 1993, 2004 and 2004 [1997].



strikes along with Greek Cypriots, while in 1938 there was a long and bitter women's strike in a textile factory in Famagusta, provoking solidarity from workers all over Cyprus. Construction workers had big strikes in 1933 and 1937 while it was they who first gained the eight-hour day in 1939. The basic demands of the Cypriot labour movement were wage raises, reduction of working time, protection from unfair dismissal, legal recognition of the trade unions, ending persecution on the basis of political beliefs and activism, protection of women and minors at work, compensation for accidents at work, taxing capital and lifting taxes from basic necessities.<sup>13</sup>

The first labour legislation was enacted in 1932, based on the 1871 British law on trade unions. Extending labour rights to the colonies was a demand of the Labour Party, while for the colonial authorities in Cyprus this was also used to counter the communist argument concerning governmental indifference on labour issues as well as bring within its orbit of control the emergent trade union movement. The first group of workers which utilised the right of legal collective organisation was the cobblers in 1932 who also had the first trade union organised and led strike in 1935 which ended in a compromise agreement. During the 1930s, however, (known as the Palmerocracy since the governor Palmer used to rule by decree<sup>14</sup>) the colonial authorities put obstacles to registering trade unions in their attempt to discourage the growth of a labour movement (Sparsis, 1999). Slocum (1972) also mentions the organisational weakness of the trade union activists and the lack of financial resources as factors for the slow development of the labour movement. External pressures and internal weaknesses led to only five trade unions being officially registered between 1932 until 1938. In any case, the legal recognition of the labour movement did not imply its political accommodation as the British stepped up repression following the uprising of

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<sup>13</sup> For a more detailed history of the early stages of the Cypriot labour movement see the official histories of and by PEO (1991), (Fantis, 2006) and SEK (Gregoriades, 1994). Until recently there had not been any systematic scientific attempt to produce an independent and integrated history of labour in Cyprus. I have attempted a sketch for this in a long article on 'the working class and the trade union movement 1920-1960' which was published as a historical supplement for the newspaper *Politis* in November 2008. However extensive archival research (as well as access to PEO's and AKEL's archives) is needed in order to move beyond the official and the partisan trade union historiography. There is now one such attempt in the form of an unpublished PhD thesis (Moustaka, 2010) on the history of the labour movement (1878-1955).

<sup>14</sup> Palmerocracy was a consequence of the 1931 Greek-Cypriot uprising resulting in the outlawing of political parties, the exile of leaders and the suspension of the Legislative Council. The causes of the 1931 revolt were largely economic and provoked by the global economic crisis of 1929 which made the tax burden imposed by the Colonial authorities on the Cypriot people unbearable. The uprising was soon hijacked by the Church leadership which used it for nationalist purposes (Erdal, 2011). The 1931 revolt is portrayed by the hegemonic Greek Cypriot nationalist historiography as the first climax of the 'national movement for enosis' (the second being 1955), signaling its maturation. It is more accurate to say however that the revolt marks the moment of the diffusion of nationalist ideology from the level of the political elite to the people. It is not coincidental that the early 1930s was the time when the slogan for 'Greek trade unions' appeared. The Communist Party of Cyprus, which opposed enosis as a bourgeois nationalist slogan and supported common struggles of the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot workers and the independence of the country, abstained from the uprising but was later criticised by the Third International and had to engage in self-critique.

1931, targeting primarily communist activists.<sup>15</sup> This included the introduction of a new Penal Code in 1933 restricting the rights of assembly, penalising unofficial and political strikes and making more severe the punishment for ‘action against the authorities’, including the death penalty.

The first cycle of struggles of the 1920s and 1930s had ended with the significant achievement of limiting the working day. Following the Nicosia private sector construction workers' indefinite strike, which was eventually won in only four days, the eight-hour day was accepted by the building contractors. In May 1939, 33 out of the 36 employers signed the first collective agreement in Cyprus for the building industry stipulating not only the eight-hour day but also a minimum daily wage rate – 18 grosia for men and 13.5 for women and trainees – and safety insurance (PEO, 1991 p. 57). Both the eight-hour day and the logic of collective bargaining and collective agreement were soon extended to the rest of the private sector as well as the rapidly expanding public sector. In 1939 alone 32 trade unions were registered while the mass unemployment and poverty caused by the disruption of the global economy as a result of WWII provoked increased popular protests<sup>16</sup> demanding relief public works. Popular protest and increased labour militancy – in 1940-1941 alone there were 47 strikes involving thousands of workers – on the one hand, and the military needs of the colonial regime caused by the onset of WWII, on the other, led to a huge expansion of public and infrastructural works which in turn led to the expansion of the waged class of the island. By 1946 there were 100 000 waged employees constituting 58% of all income earners, 80% of whom were employed in non-agricultural work and 25% employed in manufacture and repairs (Christodoulou, 1991).

The war years of 1939-1945 was a time of transformation of the context and content of industrial relations as the trade union movement expanded immensely both in numbers and in political weight, forcing the colonial government to take it seriously. The regulation and guidance of the growth and activities of the trade union movement in the ‘appropriate’ channels was also a demand of the local bourgeoisie, as can be also seen by the text of N.C. Lanitis, ‘Trade unionism and the provision of social services in Cyprus’, published in English in 1940. In the same year W.J. Hull arrived in Cyprus as a labour advisor of the colonial government and prepared a report on labour issues. On the basis of his report, and amidst the on-going industrial unrest, the colonial authorities proceeded to the creation of a Labour Department in 1941, amending the law on trade unions and

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<sup>15</sup> Anti-communism in the 1920s and 1930s existed not just at the level of the colonial state but in the society as well amongst the propertied classes and the conservative and religious strata (Katsiaounis, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the rise in prices which caused the bankruptcy of many small firms, the closure of the mines led many waged workers into famine. It is in this context that the labour movement asked for ‘bread and work’.

instituting two more laws on industrial conflict, instituting procedures for conciliation, arbitration and research and a minimum wage (Sparsis, 1999). The trade union movement viewed the new labour legislation as a small step forward that was expected to enhance the protection of labour, but at the same time criticised it for being inadequate, insufficient and disappointing, leaving the unemployed outside the trade union scope and being too restrictive in the recognition of the right to strike (Moustaka, 2010 p. 233-236). Furthermore the young and rising in power and confidence trade union movement insisted on the need for a comprehensive social insurance system and criticised again the Colonial Government's 1942 legislation on Workers' Compensation for being wanting excluding land and domestic workers as well as slow developing diseases as a result of workplace unhygienic conditions (PEO, 1987 p. 29-37; Moustaka, 2010 p. 349-350)

Furthermore WWII was instrumental in bringing about a new dynamics in the political arena of Cyprus as well. Beyond the class struggle, the antifascist and the anti-colonial struggles created new frameworks of thinking and acting. In Greece there was already an underground civil war between the EAM-ELAS guerillas and the pro-Western Right. Europe became an arena of political, military and ideological contestation between the resistance groups, the Anglo-American and the Soviet armies on the eve of the defeat of the Nazi Germany, while in the Middle East the anti-colonial mobilisations increased in scope and intensity. In Cyprus the popular front policy of the Communist Party allowed it to exit isolation and in cooperation with other left of centre personalities and forces, rise to prominence and reconstitute itself as a counter-hegemonic political bloc, securing victory in two out of the six municipalities in 1943 and four in 1946, making the Left for the first time a potential challenger of both colonial and conservative nationalist power (Katsiaounis, 2000 p.145-147).

### 1.3.3. Political and ideological conflicts and cleavages

At the same time the trade union movement tried to organise itself on a national basis. The political and ideological disagreements, however, prevented the trade unionists from uniting on a national basis and the pioneering attempt in 1939, despite its originality and ambitiousness, can ultimately be considered as a failure (Katsikides, 1988). Although there was one committee formed responsible for the organisation of the second national conference, it did not achieve its mission and in 1941 the second national trade union conference was organised by another committee made up exclusively of leftist trade unionists. Out of the second national conference the Pancyprian Trade Union Committee (Pagkipria Sintehniaki Epitropi) (PSE) was formed, made up of 17 members,

most of them also members of AKEL, the newly established front political organisation of the Communist Party of Cyprus. PSE criticised the colonial labour legislation as seen above and asked for its amendment while it also called for a struggle against the developing black market and concentrated its efforts on the organisation of agricultural workers, women and Turkish Cypriots.

The most important struggle, however, organised and led by PSE was the one concerning the rising cost of living. It was a long struggle with mass mobilisations of the employed and unemployed masses, gaining in the process the support of both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot nationalists in a truly popular demand for the control of the rise of product prices. The struggle included two general strikes with the participation of tens of thousands of workers demonstrating the strength of the working class and forcing the colonial government first to appoint a committee to study the price index and the rising cost of living and subsequently to take into consideration the positions of PSE regarding the adjustment of wage rates to the price index. The result of this struggle was the permanent linkage between product price raises and wage raises through the COLA system (automatic cost of living adjustment).<sup>17</sup>

The unity of the trade union movement, as expressed in the COLA struggle in 1943-44, proved, however, short-lived. The underlying ideological and ethnic antagonisms became explicit by 1944 when the Greek-Cypriot nationalists proceeded to form separate 'Greek' trade unions. The Greek Cypriot right wingers formed the New Trade Unions, which developed into the Confederation of Cyprus' Workers (Sinomospondia Ergaton Kiprou) (SEK) while the Turkish Cypriot nationalists had already since 1942 formed the Turkish Trade Unions, accepting only Turkish Cypriots in their membership. On the Left a small Trotskyist party was formed that existed in parallel with the Communist Party of Cyprus and its militants were also active in the trade union movement, adopting radical or 'extremist' positions according to Ziartides (Peonides, 1995). The strength of the trade union movement was, however, both as a whole and particularly its left-wing core, immense. The political trial of PSE in early 1945 and the imprisonment of its leaders is indicative of the pressures that the leftist trade union movement exerted on the colonial regime. This incident provoked mass demonstrations and international reactions and forced the colonial government to set the jailed leaders free before their sentences expired.<sup>18</sup> As Sparsis (1999) says, the whole of the

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<sup>17</sup> See PEO, 1984

<sup>18</sup> PSE leaders were found guilty of the charge of attempted overthrow of the existing order and the creation of a socialist state according to Marxist theory. The intervention of the British Labour Party was instrumental in their eventual release. For more details see also Fantis, 2006. In 1946 the left-wing-led trade union movement PSE changed its name to PEO. The fact that the leaders of the rightist New Trade Unions did not express solidarity with the imprisoned leftist Old Trade Union leaders is illustrative of the intensity and the depth of the intra-communal

period 1940-1948 was a time of industrial unrest and extended strike activity. And since the colonial government was itself a major employer, strike activity was simultaneously interpreted as political action against the regime.<sup>19</sup>

At the political level, the liberalisation permitted by the colonial regime at the beginning of the 1940s, in its effort to build up the necessary social consent for the continuation of its rule during war-time, was a turning point. This is because it acted as a catalyst in an irreversible process of mass politicisation. This politicisation found expression in the creation of mass organisations in the towns as well as in the countryside and was characterised by an intense polarisation, that degenerated into violent conflict in periods of electoral confrontations and fierce strike activity.<sup>20</sup> The Cold War and the civil war in Greece added an ideological dimension in the essentially socioeconomic and political confrontation between Left and Right in the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus. As far as the Turkish-Cypriot community is concerned, the tendencies towards separation from the Greek-Cypriot majority had already begun to be expressed in opposition to the dominance of the enosis (union with Greece) claim.

#### 1.3.4. Ethnic conflict and the seeds of division

Despite the creation of a Turkish trade union, however, most Turkish-speaking workers remained organised in the leftist trade union, Pancyprian Labour Federation (Pagkipria Ergatiki Omospondia) PEO until 1958, when pressures and threats from TMT led them to massive withdrawal. TMT was the armed Turkish nationalist organisation, formed in 1957 two years after the formation of the armed Greek / Greek Cypriot nationalist organisation, EOKA. EOKA and TMT managed to become dominant in their respective communities by 1958, which is the year when inter-communal violence started, and their political and ideological orientations (enosis and taksim nationalism as well as anti-communism<sup>21</sup>) shaped the post colonial Cypriot state and provoked its early collapse (Drousiotis, 1998, 2005). Ethnic separation was constituted as really dominant in the second half of the 1950s through the armed activity of EOKA, the Colonial Police and TMT.

Nevertheless, the seeds of the ethnic separation are to be found in the early 1940s when nationalism

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conflict.

<sup>19</sup> Note the significance attributed to the 'public opinion' factor by PEO leader Ziartides as advised by the older communist leader Servas (Peonides, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> At about this time a monarchist quasi-fascist group, known in Greece as X, appeared in Cyprus and participated in strike-breaking and anti-communist activity. This group was instrumental later on in the formation of EOKA.

<sup>21</sup> For EOKA's violent attacks against AKEL members see Poubouris, 1999

had managed to prevail within the Greek Cypriot community at the political level, with the Cypriot Left as well adopting the enosis line. This alienated Turkish Cypriots (Kakoullis, 1990; Varnava, 2004 [1997]) and facilitated the eventual dominance of the separatist nationalist forces within the Turkish Cypriot community by the late 1950s. In the words of PEO leader Ziartides (Peonides, 1995) *'We underestimated the need for equal treatment of the Turkish Cypriots within the trade union movement... most of the constitutions of our unions had not been translated to Turkish for the benefit of their Turkish members.. leaflets the same, it was rare to have Turkish speakers in conferences and it was rare to have translations of our announcements and decisions in Turkish'*.

I am not saying that the nationalism of AKEL was the same as the nationalism of the Right, although there were cases when rightist arguments were also used by AKEL in its support for enosis. It was not just more mild and tolerant of the Turkish Cypriots than the nationalism of the Right but also different in its logic. But leftist 'patriotism' and rightist 'nationalism' within the Greek Cypriot community at least until 1974, [and arguably one might add for some political forces this holds even until today], refused to recognise the Turkish Cypriots as a community with which the Greek Cypriots had to negotiate the terms of their co-existence and the political future of the island (Kakoullis, 1990; Kizilgurek, 2010). The adoption of 'enosis' as AKEL's policy, especially after 1949, which meant enosis with an authoritarian nationalist Greek state meant *de facto* that the Turkish Cypriots were seen as a minority in the political sense of the word, which did not have the right to frustrate or limit the will of the Greek Cypriot majority. The rationale of AKEL's support for enosis as a long-term goal – since its short-term one throughout the 1940s was self-government – was aimed at gaining the political leadership of the anti-colonial movement and placing civil liberty and social justice as its content. Nevertheless, by the 1950s it had lost the leadership of the anti-colonial movement and was forced to adopt the 'enosis and only enosis' line of the Ethnarchy and gradually lose its influence among the Turkish Cypriot community.

Still in 1954 PEO had 2500 and in 1955 3000 Turkish Cypriot workers as members, whereas the separatist Turkish Cypriot union had only 740 and 2214 respectively (Slocum, 1972), while PEO also established a Turkish Office and tried to maintain good relations with the Turkish trade unions. SEK, despite its more conservative Greek nationalism, also maintained relations with the Turkish trade unions in the beginning. Overall, the analyst may conclude that the intra-ethnic conflict within the Greek Cypriot community between Right and Left was more intense than the inter-ethnic one in the 1940s. The case of sports clubs is illustrative. By 1948 Greek Cypriot communist athletes were expelled from the official sports clubs and led to establish separate left wing clubs which were

organised in a separate league. The new left wing clubs which emerged were not allowed to participate in the official league until 1953 when their return was soon followed with the expulsion of the Turkish Cypriot clubs in 1955.<sup>22</sup> Extremist and violent nationalism in the development of which the Left was both a target (of physical violence as well) and unable to resist politically is a late 1950s phenomenon.

### 1.3.5. 1948 as the key moment of class struggle and a historical turning point

The conflict between the Left (AKEL/PEO/EAK<sup>23</sup>) and the Right (KEK/SEK/PEK<sup>24</sup>) reached its peak in 1948 with the strikes of the miners and the construction workers. The strikes, which were organised by the Left, lasted about four months each and there were also solidarity actions from broader sections of the working class, including a 24-hour general strike, while the Right, spearheaded by SEK, opposed them and sided with the employers and the colonial authorities. Both the miners' strike in the first half of 1948 and the builders' strike in the second half of the year were violent as strikers clashed with the strike-breakers and the colonial police and ended up with only minor immediate economic benefits, despite the significant demonstration of workers' power through the disruption of production. It is important to note the diametrically opposite histories promoted by PEO and SEK regarding the 1948 strikes. According to PEO it was itself in collaboration with the KTIBK (the Turkish trade union) which led the working class against the employers, the government and the church in the heroic Cypriot class struggle of the 1940s culminating in 1948. According to SEK, PEO's labour demands in the strikes constituted a cover for its broader political attempt to secure its control over the trade union movement by excluding SEK members from the two key sectors of the Cypriot economy. The strikes of 1948 ended up in compromise agreements on both the political and the labour fronts, which reflected the inability of either front to dominate and impose its terms on the other. Nevertheless for the collective memory and imaginary of the Left, the 1948 strikes constitute the most radical moment in its history, for some being an aborted revolution.

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<sup>22</sup> In 1960 the Turkish Cypriot clubs refused to return to a common sports federation (Nestoridou, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> EAK was the left wing farmers' union formed in 1946 out of the popular socialist clubs of the countryside. In 1955 it was made illegal and repressed by the colonial authorities along with AKEL and re-appeared as EKA. For EAK see Ilia, (2000) and for the popular socialist clubs (agrotomorfotikoi sillogoi, laika somateia) see Petas, 1992. Panayiotou (1999, 2006) argues that the Left in general and in particular these 'clubs' expressed and constituted the progressive force of modernity in Cyprus in the late colonial period.

<sup>24</sup> KEK (Kypriako Ethniko Komma) was the Greek Cypriot right wing bourgeois nationalist party formed as a reaction to the formation of the left-wing AKEL in 1942, while PEK was formed at the same time in the countryside as the conservative and religious farmers' union.

In the miners' strike, involving 2000 workers, the most important dimension was the intransigent stance of the employer corporation which stood firm until the end, making the Governor note in his report to the Colonial Office (15/5/1948) on the conclusion of the strike that the dispute had '*now the spirit of a lock out rather than a strike*' (CO 67/360/5). The refusal of the CMC to negotiate with communists in the MacCarthyite climate of the time and the generalised violence that characterised the conflict put the Colonial Government in a difficult position as its recently instituted dispute resolution mechanism could not be properly enforced. The Colonial state engaged itself primarily in a 'law and order' role and together with local bourgeois political leaders and the Archbishop, who issued a paternalist statement calling the Christian workers to go back to work, condemned the violence of the strikers and the communist instigators and attempted to pacify the workers. Its refraining from both compulsory arbitration and martial law led to complaints and criticisms of passivity and 'washing of hands' (CO 67/360/5). The intensity of the class conflict was such, however, that it could not have easily been brought within the orbit of the state; in either case neither of the two sides felt any allegiance to the Colonial state, while the conflict was politicised from the beginning with CMC attempting to institute anti-communism in Cyprus and PEO demanding the nationalisation of the mining industry (PEO, 1979).

In the builders strike, involving 800 workers, the most important dimension was the battle for the labour supply and the practice of the closed shop. PEO had the control of the labour market of the building industry and insisted on maintaining it, especially following SEK members' strike-breaking activity in the miners' strike, in the new collective agreement under negotiation. The employers were ready to accept PEO's economic demands but insisted, in collaboration with SEK, on the abolition of the closed shop and for employers' freedom to hire from either of the two unions (SEK, 1988; Gregoriadis, 1994). PEO objected, fearing that the anti-communist climate and the conservative nationalist stance of most contractors would lead to discrimination against PEO members, and responded with the compromise proposal for a mixed PEO-SEK registration office controlling the labour supply and directing workers to employers on the basis of registration order. At the same time it proposed mixed PEO-SEK workers' committees and workers' general assemblies as the final decision-making bodies on economic matters in general, confident of its clear majority in industry membership. The refusal of SEK to accept this, allowed PEO to revert back to its full control position via the closed shop and to begin the strike which was particularly bitter, politicised and violent. In the middle of the strike SEK signed an agreement with the employers, giving them full freedom of hiring, while the strike ended after the loss of 38 000 man-days, when PEO signed an agreement with the employers on the basis of its original compromise



proposal of the mixed PEO-SEK registration office but not with strict registration order (CO 67/342/3), in exchange for the employers' association's written promise to prevent its members from discriminating (PEO, 1988). SEK originally refused to sign the agreement but was eventually forced to accept this.

In 1948, amidst the bitter class and violent political conflict, the colonial government proceeded to the creation of the tripartite Labour Advisory Board, an event which signals a shift in colonial policy, from one of confrontation to one of recognition and cooperation (Sparsis, 1999). Within the Greek-Cypriot community the period 1949-1952 can be conceptualised as a turning point from the moment of class conflict and political and ideological polarisation to the moment of national-liberation unity. This was expressed through the weakening of the political confrontation between Left and Right,<sup>25</sup> signalled by the termination of the economic war<sup>26</sup> and the beginning of cooperation between PEO and SEK in the preparation, submission and negotiation of demands as well as trade unions' consultation with the employers and the colonial government on labour issues. This can be seen as the beginning of the historical class compromise upon which the hegemony (Gramsci, 1972) of the two competing nationalisms was constituted.<sup>27</sup>

#### 1.3.6. The establishment of the national industrial relations system.

The new Cypriot state that emerged in 1960 constituted essentially a development of existing colonial structures. The various departments of the Colonial Administration expanded the scope of their jurisdiction and their field of action and were renamed into ministries. The constitution of the Cypriot state in articles 21, 26 and 27 entrenched the previous conquests of the working class, recognising officially the right of free assembly and cooperation with others, including the right of trade union formation and the right to strike. Already in the political turmoil of the late 1940s and 1950s, and despite the initial resistance from the colonial authorities which posted organisers and militants to the countryside, the trade union movement as a whole continued to expand, in fact

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<sup>25</sup> The Right had managed to re-assert itself as the dominant political force, winning a substantial victory in the 1949 municipal elections while the Ethnarchy – a council of bourgeois politicians under the Church hierarchy – assumed the leadership of the anti-colonial movement.

<sup>26</sup> The economic war was basically the refusal of right-wing employers to hire left-wing workers and the refusal of left-wingers to shop from right-wing grocers.

<sup>27</sup> From the 1950s onwards the two antagonistic nationalisms structured and used by the imperialist forces of Britain, Greece and Turkey have been shaping the political field in both communities, both keeping them apart and often degenerating into blind violence – such as 1958, 1963-64, 1967 and 1974. For the development of nationalism in Cyprus see Attalides, 1979. For the chronicle of the ethnic conflict on the ground, the consequence of the 'dialectic of intolerance' Kitromilides (1977, 1979), see Patrick (1976) and Packard (2008).

immensely so,<sup>28</sup> bringing within its organisational orbit the employees of civil and public services (Iakovou, 1986). These trade unions were independent from the Right and the Left, SEK and PEO, and felt the need to say this in their name as well<sup>29</sup>. The independent unions in the public services were federated into POAS, and along with the establishment of the banking sector trade union ETYK, the civil servants' union PASIDI and the teachers' unions (POED-OELMEK-OLTEK) of signaling the full maturation of trade unionism in Cyprus, which had expanded into the public and semi-public sector.

The Turkish trade unions were re-organised on a federal basis and were officially registered in 1954, setting the basis for their full expansion in the second half of the 1950s amidst the EOKA struggle and its degeneration into ethnic conflict. The expansion of the civil service and the public sector in general constituted the material condition for the development of a new middle class or labour aristocracy of relatively well paid, educated and salaried employees. The trade union movement in parallel developed an insurance system for its members, introducing to the workers the concept of social insurance, pressurising the government to introduce an official, universal and unitary system of social insurance. The Colonial Authorities were originally reluctant, studying and discussing the matter but not proceeding to any measures. The rising pressure from the trade unions, however, and the onset of the EOKA armed action led the government to do so in 1956. In this context the colonial government took the initiative to help in the creation of an employers' organisation. This was achieved in 1959 as the first assembly of the Consultative Union of Cypriot Employers took place under the auspices of the Colonial Labour Department, becoming officially established one year later (Sparsis, 1999).

The Cypriot system of industrial relations was constructed on the British model, with voluntarism as its central concept. The Basic Agreement of 1962, reached following a thorough study of the conditions prevailing at the time and with the support of the trade unions and employers, codified this. It stipulated a procedure for negotiation and settlement of labour disputes on the basis of an industrial relations system based on free collective bargaining. The Basic Agreement did not have a legal status; it was a gentlemen's agreement constituting simply an expression of political will, moral obligation and mutual understanding of the parties' voluntary adherence to that procedure. This agreement reflected the previous balance of forces and conditions of class compromise in the late colonial period and it governed labour relations in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was considered

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<sup>28</sup> Ziartides estimates this rise in unionisation from 1950 to 1959 at 382% in general and 278% for PEO, in actual numbers from 13 556 to 65 381 and from 8 924 to 33 770 respectively (Ergasia Vol. 4, 1973)

<sup>29</sup> To be sure the broader conflict between Right and Left amidst the onset of the global Cold War could neither disappear nor be suppressed in the public sector. Especially so in politically sensitive fields such as education: in 1952 the British fired the leftist leader of the teachers' trade union (Panayiotou, 2011).

a big success by the Labour Ministry as it was decisive step in the incorporation of the working class in the state, directing labour militancy within specific procedures of dispute resolution. This was a priority for the new state in its attempt to prevent labour protest from getting out of hand. Despite the self-restraint of the trade unions in order to allow the new state to succeed, and despite the Basic Agreement, workers' militancy remained high with 25 000 workers participating in strikes in 1960 resulting in 27 000 work-days lost, while the trend continued in 1961-62 leading into prolonged strikes in 1963 resulting in 36 000 work-days lost. It was essentially the inter-communal conflict<sup>30</sup> that followed which caused the dramatic fall in labour disputes as the logic of ethno-national unity overshadowed class conflict. It is illustrative that between 1964-1966 only 6000 work days were lost.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1960s the 44-hour week was established in almost all sectors, while in 1962 the first government Five-Year Plan was launched aiming for full employment, increase in productivity, extension of social benefits and the maintenance of labour peace. In this context the social insurance system was extended to cover all employees and the self-employed, benefits were raised and in 1965 the trade union law was liberalized, making organisation easier. The various ILO Conventions were ratified by the Parliament, while with the second Five Year Plan in 1968 the government continued along the same logic, placing emphasis on training through the establishment of the Industrial Training Department. The increased labour mobilisation of 1968, with 43 000 work-days lost, gave impetus to the procedures for the strengthening of tripartite cooperation through the reform of the Basic Agreement of 1962 (Ioannou, 2010). In 1969 the employers asked for the transcription of the Agreement into law as well as legislative regulation for collective bargaining in basic services. This was rejected by both the trade unions and the state. Nevertheless an attempt was made by the government to codify industrial relations and this was discussed in the Labour Advisory Board in 1970, aimed at restricting the right to strike, forbidding it in cases of conflicting interpretation of agreements and calling the two parties to take 'the necessary measures' to prevent spontaneous strikes and lock outs. It also tried to impose compulsory arbitration in case of mutual

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<sup>30</sup> The nationalist political leaderships of the two communities that shared the bi-communal Cypriot state entered a collision course from the very beginning. The issue of unitary versus separate municipalities remained unresolved and formed the background to the crisis of 1963 which led to the withdrawal of the Turkish Cypriot community from the state. The ideologies of enosis and taksim continued to be hegemonic and shaped both the policy and the rhetorical framework of the elites. The Greek Cypriot leadership aimed at converting the Turkish Cypriot community into the status of a minority (Makarios's 13 points for constitutional amendments), whereas the Turkish Cypriot leadership aimed at full separation of the two communities (from Turk to Turk campaign) as intermediary steps to enosis and taksim respectively. Extremist nationalists from both communities were armed and trained and started fighting each other, while many crimes were also committed against civilians. Turkish Cypriots abandoned mixed villages and Turkish Cypriot villages neighbouring big Greek Cypriot villages and withdrew into enclaves (around 3% of the island's territory) to which Greek Cypriot police or civilians were not allowed entry.

<sup>31</sup> The numbers are taken from the Labour Ministry, 1989 Yearly Report.

consent by both parties. The political tension of the early 1970s, however, and the events of 1974 delayed the Code of Industrial Relations until 1977.

The war of 1974, beyond the territorialisation of partition, also changed the internal balance of power between labour and capital as it caused the violent uprooting of tens of thousands of farmers from their land (mostly Greek Cypriots), provoking a second wave of proletarianisation. Panayiotopoulos (1995) describes the 39% unemployment rate that followed the 1974 war as a '*compressed enclosure movement*' that has destroyed the peasantry as a class and accelerated the servicisation process, effecting a new sort of class compromise based on the sacrifice of the working class for the country. '*What appears as remarkable is the extent to which capital formation during the period of post war reconstruction was paid for by waged workers in terms of a reduction in real wages and other benefits...Waged workers' share of income tax increased from 31.5% in the pre war period to 68% by 1978*'. According to PEO estimates published in 1979, Panayiotopoulos continues, there was a 25% reduction in the living standard but, according to PEO '*at least the retreat of the working class occurred in an organised manner and under the control of the trade union movement*'.

This was reflected and crystallised in the Code of Industrial Relations signed in 1977, still in effect today, which stipulated the rights and obligations of the social partners with respect to collective bargaining, joint consultation and management prerogatives and instituted procedures for the settlement of disputes, mediation, arbitration, public inquiry and grievances arising from the interpretation or implementation of the collective agreements. The Code itself does not constitute legislation but, again following the British voluntarist tradition, a Gentlemen's Agreement (Soumeli, 2005). It differentiates between disputes of 'interests' and disputes of 'rights' and it provides for a four stages dispute resolution procedure concerning disputes over both. The first stage is direct negotiations between trade unionists and employer/s' representatives. Failing to reach a mutually accepted agreement, one or both of them may resort to state mediation. In such case they fill in an application form and submit it to the Labour Relations Department of the Labour Ministry. Within 15 days the government, after a series of negotiations with both parties, is obliged to propose a compromise solution. If this is not accepted by one or both parties, a deadlock is announced and each side is free to take any lawful measure to promote its interests including industrial action. If both parties agree they can resort to 'voluntary' yet 'binding' arbitration as a third stage and a public inquiry as a fourth stage. Industrial action in disputes over rights is strictly speaking prohibited but at the same time '*strikes are permitted in all cases where there is a flagrant violation*

of an existing agreement or practice' (Sparsis, 1998).

### 1.3.7. The servicisation of the economy, immigration and the entry into the EU

The process of tertiarisation or servicisation of the economy started before the war of 1974 with the expansion of the tourist industry which was embarked upon as a national development strategy expected to bring in foreign currency and create jobs. Private investors were given generous incentives by the state, as the tourist industry has been viewed as the means and the motor of broader economic development.<sup>32</sup> The war of 1974 disrupted the development of the tourist industry as the two major areas of high tourist investment, Kyrenia and Famagusta, came under the control of the Turkish army. The recovery was, however, quick as by 1979 tourist arrivals reached the 1973 levels. The process of transformation of the Cypriot economy and society (in the southern part under the control of the Republic) became more rapid and more deep in the 1980s and 1990s as urbanisation and internationalisation re-organised and restructured both labour and capital in the island.

Table 1: Progressive change in the gainfully employed population by broad sector  
(figures refer to the full time equivalent no. of working persons)

<b><i>Gainfully employed population by broad sector</i></b> (full-time equivalent number of persons who work in or for the establishment)	<b><i>1973</i></b> <b><i>(252 700)</i></b>	<b><i>1986</i></b> <b><i>(220 100)</i></b>	<b><i>1999</i></b> <b><i>(295 300)</i></b>
Primary sector <i>Agriculture, forestry, mining and quarrying</i>	38.4% 97 200	16.5% 36 400	8.9% 26 200
Secondary sector <i>Manufacturing, electricity, gas, water and construction</i>	25.8% 65 100	30.5% 67 000	22.2% 65 700
Tertiary sector <i>Trade, restaurants and hotels, transport, storage and communications, financing, insurance, real estate and business services and commerce, social and personal services</i>	35.8% 90 400	53.0% 116 700	68.9% 203 400

Labour statistics 2004 p.32

<sup>32</sup> The rapidity of development, however, brought about huge environmental costs as the construction of hotels has been haphazard and largely unplanned. Christodoulou (1991: 143) notes the laxity in law enforcement and political patronage and corruption as the main reason for this.

Tourist development was accompanied by the decline of agriculture and the conversion of farm land into real estate, especially in the coastal areas which were taken over by hotel units. The expanding housing needs of the displaced population at first, and subsequently the needs of the booming tourist industry, provoked the expansion of building ventures both in Nicosia as well as in the coastal towns. Blocks of flats came to reshape the urban landscape while a lot of contractor and developing firms appeared to take advantage of a growing market. The expansion of construction came to offset the slow but steady decline of manufacturing in the 1980s and 1990s, which was largely a consequence of the inability of Cypriot production to compete with the Asian lower labour cost production. Despite the relative decline of manufacturing, the trade union movement continued to grow and maintain high levels of trade union density until recently. The rapidity of development of the tourist industry<sup>33</sup> also brought about increased interaction between tourists and Cypriots and facilitated the further erosion of traditional norms and values, accelerating the westernisation process in the island. The main characteristic of this development was the mass desertion of the countryside and the demise of agriculture as farmers' children left their villages in search of work in the rapidly expanding towns of Cyprus, especially Nicosia and Limassol. The new jobs that were created in the 1980s and 1990s were primarily service jobs. As Rangou (1983; 66) claimed, agricultural employment had lost the status it had in traditional society and was no longer a preferable occupation.

Economic development was accompanied also by an impressive rise of Cypriot educational level, both south and north of the green line. The majority of secondary education graduates proceeds to tertiary education and in the 2000s to post graduate studies as well, resulting in a highly qualified and young segment of the labour force taking up the expanded professional positions of the knowledge economy. The establishment of three state universities and a series of private higher education establishments both in the north and in the south is illustrative of this transition. Today tertiary education in Cyprus is an important industry including beyond the various colleges, 14 universities, 7 in the south and 7 in the north while 2 more are in the process of establishment in the north.

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<sup>33</sup> For a review of the development and expansion of the tourist industry as it was happening through the public perspective of business see Arhontides, 2007.

Table 2: Employment by economic activity and sex in 2006  
(measures real persons working full time and/or part-time)

<b><i>Employment by economic activity and sex in 2006 (average)</i></b>	<b><i>Total 357 281</i></b>	<b><i>Male 200 359</i></b>	<b><i>Female 156 922</i></b>
Agriculture, hunting forestry and fishing	15 222	10 631	4 592
Mining and quarrying	683	664	19
Manufacturing	37 261	25 076	12 185
Electricity, gas and water supply	2 916	2 507	410
Construction	40 046	36 621	3 425
Wholesale and retail trade, repairs	63 236	37 422	25 814
Hotels and restaurants	23 851	10 986	12 865
Transport, storage and communication	20 217	13 226	6 991
Financial intermediation	18 924	9 284	9 640
Real estate, and business activities	26 673	11 860	14 813
Public administration	29 935	20 123	9 812
Education	24 783	6 070	18 713
Health and social work	14 211	3 965	10 246
Other (community, social and personal) services	21 571	9 587	11 984
Private households with employee persons	14 803	380	14 423
Extra territorial organisations	2 947	1 956	991

Labour force survey 2006 p.73

Table 3: Employment status of the labour force in Cyprus in 2006

<b><i>Full and part time employment by professional status and sex in 2006 (average)</i></b>	<b><i>Total (357 281)</i></b>	<b><i>Male (200 359)</i></b>	<b><i>Female (156 922)</i></b>
Employers	22 651	19 985	2 667
Self employed	46 340	31 314	15 025
Employees	280 505	146 859	133 645
Family workers	7 786	2 201	5 585

Labour force survey 2006, p.57

Table 4: Progressive change in trade union membership and density \*

Year	1971	1981	1991	2001	2007
Union members	80 469	124 299	154 049	174 577	208 206
Union members / total waged (union density)	60.00%	80.77%	77.09%	63.39%	53.96%

Source: Trade union registrar

\* [This table concerns the total number of unionised in both the broader public and the private sectors. Two things must be noted here. 1) that overall union density levels rise because of the inclusion of the public sector and 2) the drop in density levels in the last two decades is actually less than it seems as far as the Cypriot workers are concerned. The drop becomes so stark because of the influx of immigrant workers who proportionally tend to be non-unionised. This is analysed in chapters 4 and 6.]

More importantly the second proletarianisation wave of the 1970s and 1980s completed the entry of women into the labour market as in the difficult economic conditions the male wage was simply not enough for the support of the family. The entry of women into the labour market was a decisive moment in the struggle for gender equality. Nevertheless, the increased economic independence achieved by women did not extend to the private / home context and did not liberate them from the burdens of housework and reproductive work.<sup>34</sup> In the labour market women came to occupy temporary, part-time and low paid positions and were concentrated in feminised occupations such as cleaners, salespersons, clerical workers, nurses and child-carers/kindergarten teachers etc.

The rapid economic development of the island, characterised by some as the ‘economic miracle’, was characterised also by the entry of offshore finance capital, resulting in the expansion of professional work positions: economists, accountants, lawyers, administrators both in the public and the private sector. This is another dimension of the structural transformation leading not so much to the creation of a new middle class through the expansion of the autonomous professions but most importantly the office-isation of work and the development of a sizable labour aristocracy based on public and banking sector workers and their very strong trade unions, PASIDI and ETYK. The

<sup>34</sup> For middle class and professional labour aristocratic Cypriot women there was a positive change in this respect – achieved at the expense of foreign care workers through the import of domestic labour power, primarily south east Asian women, the ‘servants of globalisation’ in Parrenas’s (2001) terms. These women workers are overtly exploited on the basis not only of class but also of gender and race (Panayiotopoulos, 2005).



rapid expansion of offshore banking allowed the entry into the Cyprus economy of huge amounts of foreign currency, deepening Cyprus' connection with the global economy. Offshore banking corporations were attracted to Cyprus because of its strategic geographical location and its low-tax financial system. The first policy statement and guidelines for the establishment of offshore banking units and offshore financial companies was issued in 1981 (Phylaktis, 1995) and these have expanded immensely in the last three decades.<sup>35</sup> More generally, at the geo-political level the triple politico-economic structure of foreign and trade relations of the Republic of Cyprus with the West, the USSR and the Arab world allowed the transition of Cyprus from a semi-peripheral economic area to a rich commercial centre. This shift from the periphery to the core of the global economic system was concluded in the 2000s with entry into the EU. Cyprus has benefited from the processes of globalisation as it was transformed to a connecting node of the flow of value in the economic networks of East and West, North and South (Panayiotou, 2005). Despite the abnormal political condition in the island (partition, militarisation etc), Cyprus was a place of stability in comparison with the turbulent Middle East,<sup>36</sup> for financial investments that were encouraged by low tax rates.

The expansion of the tourist and construction industries, on the one hand, and the transformation of Cyprus into an international centre of financial services, on the other, allowed the development of living and educational standards of the local labour force, creating labour shortages in manual and unskilled work. In the north (occupied) part, the condition of the non recognition of the Turkish Cypriot state and its inability to develop trading relations and attract tourism rendered it a dependent district of Turkey not only at the political and military levels but also at the socio-economic one. A huge public sector substantially funded by the Turkish state was developed with strong and militant trade unions that led the revolt of 2002-2003 against Denktas's regime, while the private sector became the field of super-exploitation of unorganised and often non registered Turkish Cypriots but primarily Turkish immigrants. By the 1990s Cyprus became from a country exporting labour to a country importing labour from the Middle East, Eastern Europe and South East Asia. Although the trade unions were originally hostile to this development, as the first permits were given to some employers, they gradually came to accept it and adapted their policy, attempting to recruit the foreign workers as the only way to prevent them from affecting negatively the wages and working conditions of the Cypriot workers. Nevertheless discrimination, racialisation and gendering of the immigrant workers was prevalent (Trimikliniotis and Pantelides, 2003).

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<sup>35</sup> It is something of a common secret in Cyprus that an important part of offshore banking operation is money laundering.

<sup>36</sup> The civil war in Lebanon in the 1980s led to the transposition of substantial financial processes from Beirut to Limassol and Nicosia.

Table 5: Number and allocation of the foreign workers in sectors in 2000 and 2005

<b><i>Foreign workers by economic activity</i></b>	<b><i>2000 (26 398)</i></b>	<b><i>2005 (55 827)</i></b>
Agriculture	2 069	3 952
Manufacturing	2 220	4 696
Constructions	1 516	5 613
Wholesale/retail trade/repair	3 345	6 071
Hotels and restaurants	4 395	11 502
Transport, storage, communication	1 204	1 631
Private households	7 737	15 749
Other	3 522	10 565

Labour statistics 2005, p. 60

The entry into the EU accelerated the influx of migrant labour in Cyprus and de facto subverted the Cypriot migration model, based on the ‘guest worker’ logic, restricting the work permit to 4 or 5 years and demanding in advance the link of the migrant worker with a specific local employer. EU citizens, who constitute today the majority of the non-Cypriot labour force, are free to move from one employer to the other and so are immigrants from third countries who are long-term residents in Cyprus and enjoy a semi-legal status, being somewhere in between naturalisation and the black market. The status of ‘illegality’ of newly arrived workers from third countries without work permits, the used and abused undeclared labour, completes the picture of fragmentation and multiple status and rights regimes of non Cypriot workers (Trimikliniotis, 2009). The opening of the checkpoints in 2003<sup>37</sup> has led to a significant increase in the number of Turkish Cypriots employed in the south, some formally registered and others informally, while residing in the north. In 2009 there were 2323 Turkish Cypriot registered workers in the south, 57 460 third country nationals with work permits and 83 387 EU nationals, while the undeclared workers are estimated to be around 30 000 (IOM, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> This was an event of huge significance both short term and long term wise. The immediate consequence was the temporary disappearance of the state, or rather the de facto challenge by the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot masses through their crossing, of the regime of territorial division and ethnic separation (Demetriou, 2007). In the longer term the opening of the checkpoints has increased the mutual visibility of the two communities and has fulfilled a precondition for peace and reconciliation, rapprochement and inter-communal cooperation. With hindsight one can say that while indeed what has been achieved is less than what had been hoped for, the opening of the checkpoints in 2003, and especially the opening of Ledras Street in 2008 has signalled a turning point in the history of the country's division and conflict.

In the north, migration from Turkey has expanded exponentially in the last two decades de factor subverting the demographic composition of the Turkish Cypriot community. The relatively open border between Turkey and north Cyprus and the politico – economic situation in northern part of the island as a result of the 1974 war and its consequences in the on-going Cyprus problem, has essentially created a much more deeply and multiply segmented labour market and society with large semi formal and informal sections. Turkish migrants in Cyprus, most of them belonging themselves to ethnic minorities within Turkey but constituting today the majority in north Cyprus are essentially divided into three categories – the TRNC citizens, the registered workers and the informal workers integrating and competing with Turkish Cypriots in multiple and complex ways and with variable intensity. As Yashin (2006) says, the antagonistic relation between Turkish Cypriots and Turks cannot be seen simply in terms of locals and immigrants, but in the light of the power of the Turkish state in north Cyprus and the particularities and peculiarities of the existing socio – political situation. The class question in north Cyprus is essentially more complex and inextricably intertwined with the population and the citizenship questions and it is not easy to be analysed using simple theoretical assumptions and political positions deriving from universally and objectively applied principles.

#### 1.4. The research problem

The historic strength of the Cypriot working class has essentially been undermined by the ethnic conflict and the division of the country. Nevertheless the Cypriot labour movement, despite its division on ideological and ethnic bases and despite the *de facto* partition of the country itself, has been able to set up a series of institutions and customary practices through which labour relations were regulated and living and working standards were relatively protected. The trade union movement was effectively incorporated into the state by the late 1970s, nevertheless it did so from a position of relative strength. Although socialism through class struggle was downplayed in favour of pragmatist moderation and corporatist practice, the trade union movement remained powerful in terms of organisation in the 1980s, reaching and maintaining density levels as high as around 80%.

As a result of the more general processes of economic and geo-political globalisation, capital flows and labour movement across borders and the broader socio-economic transformation under way in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, both the structure of employment and the character of work itself have changed. The old institutions framing and regulating the utilisation of labour power and social production have become less effective and progressively less capable of addressing the new

realities on the ground. And this in its turn had a series of social consequences and political implications. This development raises the questions that this thesis is designed to address.

The aim of this thesis is to examine these new realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the labour process and the employment patterns in Cyprus and analyse how the labour movement has responded to them. What is the current condition of trade unionism in Cyprus, in organisational, functional and political terms? What forms has the erosion of the old institutions taken and what have the direct and indirect impacts been? What is the actual state of affairs at workplace level in terms of the management and the segmentations of the labour force? How are hierarchies constructed at work and what are the existing dynamics and power relations between workers and bosses, trade union leaders and trade union members?

The analysis of the various aspects, levels and dimensions of contemporary class struggle through the examination of specific incidences and empirical examples is expected to shed light on the instantiation and composition of class in Cyprus in the present and the trends for its future. The future prospects of the labour movement are to be sure determined by its past history but they are effectively being shaped in the present tense and its current condition. The theoretical and political stake of this thesis is then, its ability to offer a descriptive analysis of contemporary labour relations in Cyprus that can illuminate the processes of class formation and awareness and both illustrate and contribute to the processes of class consciousness. The explanatory power of the thesis lies in its attempt to account for the reasons and the causes of phenomena such as labour deregulation and trade union decline while its analytic utility lies in its effort to penetrate into workplace dynamics and spell out the coordinates of labour segmentation and working class politics using as an axis the dialectic of resistance and control.

### 1.5. The structure of the thesis and the argument

The thesis is composed of eight chapters, which attempt to present the contemporary condition of labour relations in Cyprus and discuss the theoretical and political implications that can be drawn from the empirical study. Having introduced the basic themes and the historical context of the Cypriot labour process in this opening chapter, I can then proceed to chapter 2 where I describe and reflect upon the process of data collection, explaining and analysing my methodological choices, as well as accounting for the strategies and tactics employed in the conduct of the fieldwork. I discuss the research questions as well as the decisions I took at various stages of the fieldwork concerning

the choice of industries as well as workplaces for the seven case studies that formed the empirical core of the research project. Chapter 2, the methodological chapter, takes the form of an autobiographical narrative of the research project during 2007-2008 and was the first chapter that was written based substantially on the case study reports. The substantial part of the thesis where insights out of all the seven case studies are brought together consists of chapters 3-6, while the short chapter 7 consists of a basic informative account of the situation north of the green line and chapter 8 sums up the thesis, articulating the basic conclusions and proceeding to some modest projections.

Chapter 3 focuses on the employment dimension and examines the different forms of deregulation such as the violation or the ignoring of existing collective agreements, the expansion and diffusion of the institution of personal contracts and subcontracting and finally undeclared and informal work. It is argued that the employers' attempt at de-regulation of labour relations is not only derived from an economic, cost-cutting imperative but also and most importantly from a political imperative, aiming at the segmentation of the labour force and the individualisation of employment relations. The re-regulation of labour relations that is being attempted is based on the logic of the market, both external and internal to the firm, and this implies high labour turnover / mobility, limited trade union role and presence and enhanced managerial authority. The chapter ends with a note on the trade union response to the deregulation of employment relations opening up the next chapter.

Chapter 4 focuses on trade unionism and examines its organisational structure, efficiency and overall political role and social function in the labour process in general and the three industries examined in particular. A comparison is made between the industrial unionism of the banking industry and the general private sector trade unionism of the hospitality and construction industries where the former, despite some recent challenges, remains very strong and effective while the latter is being weakened and rendered less effective to maintain and expand labour rights and benefits, let alone shape industrial relations and socio-economic policy in general. It is argued that the big general trade unions in their current form are essentially incapable of responding effectively to capital's offensive, plagued as they are with organisational difficulties, limited appeal and systemic integration. Trade unionism in Cyprus is changing function as class compromise becomes more and more entrenched – from one of class mobilisation to one of personalised service. Trade union integration into the state is essentially both a cause and a consequence of the strength of the logic of ethnic communalism deriving from the historical and on-going division of the country and

facilitated by the continuing hegemony of nationalism.

Chapter 5 focuses on workplace level dynamics and processes and examines the manifestations of managerial power, the role of gender and ethnicity in the structuring of labour relations and the construction of occupational and sectoral/industrial identities. Formal and informal hierarchies and power differentials are seen as producing cleavages among the labour force and it is argued that these divisions are based on social discrimination, technical skills and productivity, experience, age and seniority. Labour segmentations are not only a consequence of different employment regimes but also internal divisions of labour and the associated status linked to particular work positions and tasks as well as social networks within and without the workplace. These segmentations to be sure are also reflected and exacerbated in and by discrepancies in the size of wages and salaries.

Chapter 6 attempts to bring together the empirical insights from the previous chapters as well as the theoretical ones from the literature review of the first chapter in order to discuss the processes of class composition at both micro and macro levels. The relation of workers to their work, the segmentations of the labour force and the different conceptions of workers' interests are analysed in order to grasp the structural, ideological and political aspects of class. It is argued that class is composed through the incidents of struggle which takes different forms of resistance to management, to work itself and to capital as a whole. The chapter ends with an analysis focused on the strike as the most advanced form of collective action against capital, illuminating both its impacts on the workforce and the key role of militant minorities in bringing it about. The ambivalent and instrumental trade union conception of the strike weapon along with the deep segmentations among the labour force, on the one hand, and the ambivalent and unpredictable political stance of the excluded precarious workers, on the other, renders class struggle at macro level ultimately an indeterminate phenomenon. At the micro level, however, precarious subjectivities shaped by fear and freedom, the imposition of individualisation and the condition of vulnerability renders social networking and collectivism not only a political but also a life dire need. Finally the notions of class and ethnicity and their inter-relation as public discourses are examined in the attempt to explain the inability of trade unionism to incorporate precarious and especially immigrant workers in its ranks.

Chapter 7 takes a look at labour relations and the working class north of the green line and attempts some preliminary comparisons between north and south. After a brief examination of the historical and political context the unique and exceptional state of northern Cyprus is seen in terms of its

impacts on the society and the economy of north Cyprus and the prevailing labour conditions. The division between the Turkish Cypriots and the Turkish immigrants is analysed in the context of working class segmentation while the issues of the informal economy, trade union activism and the class-ethnicity nexus as coordinates of communal identity are re-examined in the light of the situation in north Cyprus.

Finally chapter 8 sums up the thesis bringing the various themes together and spells out its main conclusions as a basis upon which some projections about the future prospects of the labour movement in Cyprus can be made.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Methodology and fieldwork**

### 2.1. Choice of sources and methods.

Given the relative absence of any extended research on the labour relations system in Cyprus, I was inevitably initially directed to the international bibliography on labour relations in order to construct the conceptual framework for the investigation. This involved engaging with labour process and flexibility theories, rationalisation and empowerment theories, consumption and identity, gender and ethnicity theories. The various perspectives on industrial relations such as unitarist, pluralist and radical were identified and related to different sociological conceptions and hence different empirical research strategies.

The first decision I made at this stage was the choice of qualitative as opposed to quantitative methods for the collection of the relevant data. The absence of any systematic quantitative research and the unavailability of quantitative data in Cyprus on labour relations, – there is no Workplace Employment Relations Survey here – meant that I had no indications about trends, issues perceived as important or even basic information that could constitute a descriptive account upon and with which I could begin the research. My resources in the context of the PhD thesis were too limited and it would have been impossible to conduct a large scale national survey that would attempt to be close to being somewhat representative. Even if that was possible, the data collection alone would have been merely the starting point upon which analysis and explanation would need to follow. In an uncharted territory such as labour relations in Cyprus, merely designing a survey research was bound to be difficult, as making assumptions necessary for the structuring of the questionnaires based on intuition, scant secondary evidence or international experience would be at best unsafe and at worst arbitrary.

Since the data I could hope to gather or produce – whether quantitative or qualitative – was more or less *de facto* restricted to an indicative as opposed to a potentially representative function, I opted for a more flexible approach, sensitive to the social context and for an interpretative position that recognises both the complexity and the multi-dimensionality of the social world (Mason, 2003, [1996] p. 20, p.92). Semi-structured interviews and participant and non-participant observation were I thought much more suitable means than structured questionnaires and statistical analysis, in order to penetrate into the



everyday workplace experience. I recognised that this implied spending a lot of time in the workplaces under investigation and interacting with my informants in a variety of formal and informal ways. The primary method for the selection of the informants was decided to be the snowballing technique, although taking care not to be confined to a restricted segment of the labour force. This implied the occasional use of convenience and self selection methods and making sure that all the departments of a workplace were represented in the sample.

The primary methodological tool for the conduct of the research was the interview. Although a difficult technique for the collection of information, interviewing allows the researcher to enter more deeply into the issues as well as gain a more holistic picture of the situation in a way that statistics, questionnaires and surveys do not (Mason 2003 [1996] p. 95). Putting aside the practical difficulties and inefficiencies of the above methods, such as non-response for example, interviewing has a theoretical advantage. From an ontological perspective, the inter-subjectivity that is generated during the data collection process affords a more balanced construction of both the research questions and the production of the research findings. The positionality of the researcher is taken account of, as he/she is essentially the question setter; yet the focus remains on the informants, as they are the ones who constitute the basic reference point.

From an epistemological perspective semi-structured interviews may reveal dimensions which are bound to remain hidden with other methodologies: aspects of working life experience, employee conceptions and expectations, basic elements of their broader worldview etc. This is possible because of the irreducibly interactive nature of the interview, which allows the researcher to probe the informant with supplementary questions that are based upon the informants' previous answers. The main weaknesses of the interview are that a huge amount of information is produced as the interviewees narrate their stories, out of which often only little may be directly relevant, and that interviewees might not be able to offer coherent answers to complex issues that can be stated simply as a response to a standard question (Mason, 2003 [1996] p. 92-93). The only way to attempt to get around these two difficulties is through interrupting the interviewee and re-phrasing the question and if this is repeated then adapting the linguistic codes and styles of interaction for the future interviews. Note taking of the basic points during or immediately after the interview is essential if one is not going to drown oneself in detail (Pole and Lampard, 2002, p. 144-145).

The interviews I took can be categorised into three groups, according to the position and work identity of the informants. First, there were the interviews with specialists such as state officials, employer representatives, trade unionists and researchers. These were taken throughout the duration of the research project 2006-2010 and not only during the fieldwork period (2007-2008). These expert interviews allowed me initially to contextualise the research focus and eventually clarify the content of the data gathered. For example, with trade unionists I started with sectoral secretaries, then proceeded to lower-level trade unionists who were visiting the workplaces and ended up with a second round of interviews with trade union leaders at sectoral and national level. Expert interviews were essentially instrumental in offering a more complete picture of the perspective of all three parties than that allowed through the reading of the press, both the big general newspapers as well as the trade union newspapers and the publications of the employers' associations.

Then come the management interviews at firm, workplace and departmental levels. These interviews were conducted during the fieldwork, usually at the beginning and the end of each workplace case study. They revolved around issues of recruitment and retention of staff, forms of contract, supervision, discipline and evaluation of staff, wages and benefits. Occasionally I was also able to secure some documents from the human resource management and the accounts office which were useful in the elaboration of the thesis's argument. These were salary scales, contracts, organisation charts, etc. At times, though, I faced difficulties as I was not given access to this sort of document, with the management characterising such information as confidential.

Finally come the interviews with the workers, representing all or almost all the occupations involved in the firm under investigation. In these interviews the key issues revolved around questions of working history, current work duties, relationships among colleagues and superiors, unionisation and collective action and, where applicable, their interaction with the customers. Interviews with Cypriot and non-Cypriot workers aimed to grasp the social relations at work and also link the informants' workplace experience to their broader social and political life experience. Beyond the interviews I have spent a lot of time informally interacting with workers in their break time, listening to their discussions and sometimes participating in them and taking notes both there and then as well as afterwards at home.

The empirical research took the form of seven case studies that were relatively autonomous from each other, but the data generated was used comparatively in the development of the thesis. The case studies focused on seven relatively large workplaces and although some information about the owning firm of each was collected, the emphasis was on the specific workplace rather than the firm in general. The unit of analysis was the workplace as the focus of the study was on social relations and dynamics at work rather than more generally organisational patterns and forms which would have required taking a firm as a whole for each case study. While it can be said that the firm level is where decisions are taken and policy is being implemented, the workplace is essentially where labour relations materialise and take a concrete form that can be observed if one spends enough time and embarks upon an intensive study.

The next issue that needed to be decided upon was the choice of the industries in which the case studies were to take place. The logic here was to choose large and economically significant industries that were expected to have different kinds of industrial relations in order to compare and contrast trends and reach some more generalised conclusions. These industries needed to be sectors covered by national collective agreements and thus industries with significant trade union presence. Hence the aim here was dual – both analysing the formation, or better the renewal, of the sectoral collective agreements at national level as well as examining the extent of the application and implementation of those agreements at the local workplace level. The attempt to evaluate the enforcement and the effectiveness of the sectoral collective agreements meant that I needed to opt for large firms and workplaces that were both important players in each industry and thus potentially indicating more general trends and big enough to have some sort of industrial relations organisation and regulation, whether with trade union or without trade union presence. Comparisons between unionised and non-unionised workplaces were expected to give insights not only about different forms of labour regulation but also about trade union general operation and function.

The research project started with the hospitality industry, the motor of (Greek-) Cypriot development in the 1980s and 1990s. Although an industry in recession in the last decade, it still directly employed around 24 000 people in 2006, according to official figures, and many more indirectly. The majority of hospitality industry workers are women, while in the last years immigrant presence has expanded immensely. As a low-paid and labour intensive industry involving both front line and back stage work,

the hospitality sector is a site where issues of gender and ethnicity and their impact on labour relations and workplace dynamics can be studied as processes of feminisation and sexualisation, ethnicisation and discrimination in general can be observed. As a sector with high labour turnover / mobility and traditionally flexible and atypical labour relations (Wood, 1992; Rowley and Richardson, 2000), the hospitality industry is a site where temporary, part-time and seasonal work could be compared and contrasted with the norm of full-time and permanent work.

If tourism was the motor of development in the 1980s and 1990s, it is financial intermediation that constitutes the other primary source of income in the Cypriot economy. The banking sector has expanded both in scope and significance in the last two decades as a result of the globalisation process and is now a leading sector. The study of the banking sector also makes it possible to consider those relatively well-off workers, who might be considered to constitute a labour aristocracy in Cyprus. These are overwhelmingly (almost exclusively) Cypriot and unionised in an industrial trade union, which is perhaps the strongest union in the private sector in Cyprus. The banking sector trade union, ETYK, organises 99% of the bank employees and wins benefits for them in every renewal of the collective agreement. It has strike funds and thus the capacity to organise prolonged strikes, from which it usually comes out as the winner, but at the same time the banking industry has been introducing flexible labour practices through the outsourcing of services. So labour relations in this sector contrast sharply with labour relations in the hospitality industry, broadening the picture and providing an important dimension of comparison.

Cyprus never underwent an extended industrial revolution. The absence of large factories was compensated for by the mines and the small-scale manufacturing businesses. Today there are almost no mines left and the manufacturing sector has declined enormously. So it is construction that constitutes the bulk of the secondary sector, directly employing 40 000 workers and indirectly acting as an engine of economic growth in Cyprus. Moreover, construction is an industry in which Turkish Cypriots are also employed and one in which there is extensive use of sub-contracting and informal labour. So the construction industry provides a further broadening of the picture of labour relations in Cyprus and facilitates the examination of inter-communal relations in the workplace and the significance of sub-contracting and undeclared work, the former constituting a main issue of conflict between employers and trade unions and the latter a broader issue for the state and the society.

In addition to the general interviews and the specific case studies that are described in detail (section 2.3.), I also used secondary sources in the form of trade union reports and announcements, collective agreements and legislation, trade unions' and employers associations' publications, and press articles. I found EIRO (and EWCO) sites very useful in offering brief yet accurate and comparative reports on the institutional and political developments in the Cypriot and European contexts as well as some recent research on the subject. The secondary sources used in the thesis are all referenced in the bibliography.

## 2.2. Ethical considerations

The basic ethical consideration in my research project was the need for confidentiality with respect to the personal data collected. It was important to maintain the anonymity of my informants in order to minimise the chance of placing them in future risk or potential conflict with their employer and I informed them in advance that their names would not be publicised – in some cases I did not even insist in taking their last name for my notebooks, recording them simply with their first name and their occupation. Although a significant part of the data was collected by means of informal interactions, I considered it vital to inform my respondents in advance that I was conducting research on labour relations and that I intended to use the information for the purposes of a publication. Thus the participants' informed consent to my research was of fundamental significance. Needless to say that the participants had the right to privacy and thus some did not wish to answer some or indeed any of my questions, as well as the right to withdraw even after they have been interviewed. Fortunately, other than a few refusals, I did not face significant problems with this. Since anonymity was guaranteed, it was in any case unlikely that the participants would act in that way. In any case, in each workplace I conducted interviews with only a segment of the labour force and undoubtedly the willingness of the staff to be interviewed was of key significance in the eventual choice of the participants.

The interviews with managers and trade unionists were, as expected, longer and covered a different and enlarged range of issues. Information collected from staff interviews was inevitably used in such more specialised and more in-depth interviews with managers and trade unionists. However, the names of my informants (employees) as well as the specific examples which illustrate their stories were not disclosed either to managers or to trade unionists as this might have had a negative effect on my

informants. This allowed me to get different perspectives, more detail and to cross-check the validity of claims about specific events, conditions, enforcement of rules etc.

Having set the basic ethical parameters, however, does not mean that all is done with. The most important as well as most difficult issue was a very practical one: dealing with 'off the record' information. Inevitably 'off the record' information, especially from managers and trade unionists, influenced the conduct of the research. However, can this information be used, given that the informants do not officially (and thus will not publicly) endorse it? I decided to use such information since leaving it out would have resulted in a distorted, largely formalistic view of the situation which is distant from the reality as this is experienced on the everyday level. Wherever I used 'off the record' information I specify this.

## 2.3. The seven case studies

### 2.3.1. The hotels

I chose for my first case study a workplace that was the site of the longest strike in the history of Cyprus. This hotel, belonging to a public company associated with a well known business-politician family, is located in the peripheral town of Larnaka. This hotel company has since the late 1990s publicly refused to abide by the sectoral collective agreement by resigning from the employers' union, EXEK, while staying in the second hoteliers' association STEK which it had very recently been a founding member after the split in PASIXE. In the words of a hoteliers' spokesperson, the owners and managers of the company began 'their revolution' in the late 1990s, experimenting with new labour relations by means of personal contracts. This 'revolution' against the collective agreement implied a conflict with the trade unions, but the company was fully prepared to take the risk. The company offered/imposed personal contracts with its key/skeleton staff, and then proceeded to the subcontracting of cleaning and housekeeping, and the outsourcing of the pastry, laying off a number of staff and asking some of them to apply to its subcontractors. The unions responded with a strike that was fought bitterly for 6 months in 1999. Through an examination of the press of the time, as well as the research findings of the commission appointed by the government to investigate the matter, I realised that the strike in 1999 had broader repercussions in the hospitality industry, as it constituted essentially an open

battle over the terms of labour utilisation in the industry. Although the company was forced to compensate the staff it laid off, it did succeed in its long term objectives, which were the ousting of the trade unions from the hotels and the abandoning of the sectoral collective agreement. The company proceeded to set up a trade union of its own. In 2005 there was a short strike in the kitchen of this hotel provoked by wage demands. Unions were invited back in but the whole affair ended up in a compromise, first between the company and the chef/strike leader who got compensated and laid off and then between the company and the kitchen workers, who gained some wage increases which later extended to the rest of the staff as well. Hence the unions did not manage to stay in the hotel. This was as far as I could get from the outside.

The next step was to attempt to continue the research in the hotel premises. Entering the hotel was relatively easy. I spoke with the front office manager, the second in the hierarchy of the hotel, and explained to him the purpose of my visit. I told him about my PhD course and my university, about the funding institution and the contract I have with the publishing institution and asked him first for an interview and then for his permission to have a series of interviews with the rest of the staff of the hotel. He did not fully understand the length and depth of this procedure, although I did let him know that I was going to be a frequent visitor of the hotel for the next weeks.

I spent three weeks in the hotel, usually around 4 hours every day, talking to as many of the staff as possible. Most of the interviews were recorded but some were not. This happened when the person was not fully available and could not leave his work post unattended, such as for example the gardener or the barmen. In such cases I took notes. I have had some informal conversations as well, usually in the second or third interaction with one informant. These were not recorded on the spot but recalled and noted down later at home.

At first the hotel staff was hesitant to talk to me. Some were suspicious that the information was bound to end up with the management. I assured them that the information was strictly confidential and that in the book the references were bound to be completely anonymous. As they saw me in the premises however, day in and day out, they began to smile at me and ask me about the progress of my research. As time passed my interactions with the hotel staff became more and more interesting, revealing more and more information. Some interviews were short and limited in scope, some others, especially with

older staff, were long and detailed.

Following up on the first case study, which focused on a luxury, non-unionised hotel in Larnaka, a not particularly touristic area, I decided to move to Protaras, one of the most touristic areas of Cyprus. Protaras is a seaside resort with no local residents. It is essentially a concentration of tourist establishments working exclusively in the summer season, most of them closing down during the winter months. The timing of the fieldwork was ideal for the investigation of the hotel industry in the peak tourist season and Protaras was an area suitable for an investigation of mass tourism. What were to be the differences in the labour process of a hotel selling essentially sun and sea compared to one selling primarily spaces for business and social events? With respect to the characteristics of the second hotel, I aimed for a unionised, or at least a partially unionised hotel, of a similar, (that is medium) size to the first hotel, but one catering for mass as opposed to elite tourism. This was bound to eliminate size as a variable, while leaving the (lower) quality of service delivery, and the presence of trade unions as the independent variables in the examination of the organisation of work. What were the differences in the division of labour and the labour process and to what extent were these caused by the mass tourism / unionised context?

Another dimension that needed to be taken into consideration was ownership patterns. The first hotel belonged to a group of businessmen linked by family and friendship patterns under the leadership of one famous and traditional capitalist/politician who has retired in the last decade from the management of the hotel holding company whilst remaining as the primary shareholder. As an employer the first company was chosen because of its 'revolutionary' drive in the late 1990s to abolish the sectoral collective agreement and kick out the trade unions. The second case study, I thought, ought to examine an equally dynamic situation from the capital side. A bigger company, with a newcomer capitalist/politician family at its head, expanding immensely during the last decade, both in the hotel as well as in the real estate sector. The hotel eventually chosen was one that was bought a few months ago by this big and ever expanding hotel company in Cyprus. How are labour relations structured in one of the biggest employers of the hospitality industry in the heart of his empire in the area around Paralimni?

Entering the second hotel was equally as easy as the first hotel. I spoke with the manager of the hotel,



and explained to him the purpose of my visit. The interview with him was not particularly helpful as he was in a hurry and answered very briefly to my questions. He did not have a lot to say anyway, I thought, as he is too young and this hotel is his first managing position. He did give me his permission to conduct my research, and at the time I considered this enough. I took interviews from almost a third of the staff and had informal on the spot dialogues with more than half of the staff.

The fieldwork in this case study was shorter but more intensive. It was completed in 2 weeks, the first spending around 6 hours per day in the premises and the second staying in the hotel and being a customer as well as a researcher. In parallel I took two more expert interviews from trade unionists of the hotel sector of the Famagusta area, the area around Paralimni, and two expert interviews from the higher echelons of this leading company of the sector. I tried to interview a third big man in this company, the director responsible for the staff, but he completely ignored me at the time. I eventually interviewed him a month later, after the completion of the case study; he presented the public image of the hotel bearing little relation to the reality on the ground as I had witnessed and experienced it. He insisted to his version of the story even after I confronted him. That interview is more useful as an account of the official and textbook position of the firm rather than as an account of what is going on in the firm. Essentially it illustrates the danger of one getting a superficial and distorted view if one stays at the management level alone. My stay in the hotel allowed me to observe the operation of the hotel during the early morning and late evening times as well, while the fact of being a customer myself gave me the opportunity to have short but repeated conversations with the staff of the hotel. Like in the first case study, most of the interviews were recorded but some were not.

In this hotel as well, the staff was at first hesitant to speak to me. Those that spoke to me gave me relatively short interviews. However, the participant observation context as well as the experience from the first case study allowed me to penetrate deeper into the issues, examining them from different perspectives. How did the staff of the hotel see me? The reactions I think I provoked varied (like in the first hotel) according to the person and the timing. Many saw me as an investigative journalist, others as a management spy, others as a trade unionist and others as a weird guy wasting his time. Or at least this is the impression I was receiving from time to time during the fieldwork. The reception I got from the room cleaners is illustrative. At first they did not want to talk to me at all. 'I do not want any troubles with the boss' was their typical reply to my request for an interview. Then however, after

many days passed and a serious problem came up, they came up to my room to make their complaint against their boss. (The manager of the hotel had asked the room cleaners to collect the personal belongings of workers working in other hotels of the firm, but staying in this hotel, in black bags and take them out of the rooms, so that he could give the rooms to customers.) Interestingly the manager himself had felt the need to inform me about this, before proceeding to do it on that same day. Due to the relatively small number of staff in this hotel, I was thus able to become involved in the workplace life and this was being recognised. My official neutrality in workplace conflicts and my status as an outsider yet co-present, gave me kind of a moral authority in the sense of the impartial observer that is not implicated in the firm and can thus see more clearly the rights and the wrongs.

Following up on the second case study, which focused on a mass / relatively cheap and partially unionised hotel in Protaras, an entirely touristy area, I decided to move to Paphos, a small town where the second airport is located and the most rapidly developing area in Cyprus. Whereas the development in the Paralimni area begun in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s, in Paphos this process occurred a decade later; beginning in the 1990s and reaching its peak in the 2000s. Whereas the Paralimni area is primarily a site of relatively cheap youth tourism, Paphos is catering more for family and elderly relatively expensive tourism, what the authorities like to call ‘quality tourism’. The tourist season is much bigger in Paphos as tourists come not only for sun and sea but also for sightseeing in the many archaeological places and relaxation in the many luxury hotels. Hence the third case study area differs from both the first partially touristic area and the second entirely touristic area. Paphos is highly touristic yet it is not merely a tourist resort; before anything else Paphos is a developing area.

With respect to the characteristics of the third hotel, I aimed for a fully unionised hotel so as to compare it with the first non-unionised and the second partially unionised hotel, and at the same time I introduced size as another independent variable, targeting for a big hotel as opposed to the two previous medium-sized ones. There were only a few big hotels in Paphos having more than 400 rooms and after a discussion with a trade unionist I found out that there was no such thing as a fully unionised big hotel. There were two highly unionised ones and after I got rejected by the one, I got accepted by the other – which caters for elite tourism in a mass context.

The third hotel is owned by a company which owns five hotels in Cyprus. This company was formed in

the early 1980s by a big and pioneer developer of the Paphos area. This specific individual capitalist, who is the biggest shareholder and president of the group of companies which goes under his name, started his business (building and selling) in the northern coast of Cyprus prior to the war of 1974 and continued in the Middle East immediately after the war. Returning to Cyprus in the early 1980s he focused his business activities in Paphos, then the least developed area in the island. Through his cooperation with the local church leader (who is currently the archbishop of Cyprus<sup>38</sup>) he managed to acquire enormous pieces of land including coastal land for tourist development. As the first entrant in the development business of the area he was able to secure a competitive advantage with respect to other capitalists. Unlike the two previous capitalists whose hotels were examined, this one was never directly involved in institutional politics, leaving this role for his wife (local government) and son (developers' and hoteliers' associations).

The huge size of the third hotel introduces another variable in the research. Catering for more tourists means employing more staff and employing more staff means employing more managers and supervisors. From a practical point of view and for my purposes it inevitably meant more interviews so as to achieve the target of covering 1/5 to 1/4 of the staff. More significantly a bigger workplace is expected to be more differentiated with respect to its departments and sections and to have more formalised procedures with respect to organisational, managerial and labour matters. What are the characteristics of a big, mostly unionised workplace (unlike the two previous case studies) of a big expanding employer – a dynamic capital situation like the second case study – , in a luxurious service context – like the first case study – ?

Entering the third hotel was as easy as the other two hotels. I spoke with the manager of the hotel, and explained to him the purpose of my visit. The interview with him was very useful and very friendly as I think he liked the idea of research in the hotel he runs. He asked me to give him and maybe also his middle managers some feedback on my research findings in order to improve the management of the hotel, as he repeatedly emphasised. I explained to him that the research will be intensive and that it was

<sup>38</sup> There is nothing unique or exceptional in this particular cooperation. In fact it can be seen as one example among many. The Church of Cyprus is the biggest landowner in Cyprus and one of the biggest capitalists in the island with huge investments in many industries especially banking, tourism and real estate development both directly and indirectly. And of course the economic power of the Church is complemented with its ideological power; and both taken together can explain its historical and contemporary political influence and involvement in state affairs and even party politics. The current Archbishop does not even keep the pretenses: his involvement in the election of the Head of Parliament and his statement regarding the strike in KEO in early June 2011 are only the two most recent examples. For the historical concentration and retainment of the Church's economic and political power see Michael, 2005 and Erdal, 2011.

bound to be completed in two weeks and he assured me that I have his permission to conduct it. The fact that I was affiliated to a public/government research institution mattered here as well as in the previous case studies in the sense that it allowed me to assume the status of a ‘serious’ person doing ‘serious’ work, especially *vis-à-vis* the managers of various sorts.

The fieldwork in this case study was short, like the second case study, but even more intensive. It was completed in two weeks but by spending 8-9 hours every day there talking with as many of the staff as possible from all departments and all positions. I took 52 interviews from the hotel (including some from the central staff of the company) and four interviews from trade unionists (two from each of the two main trade unions, PEO and SEK: the two sectoral district secretaries and the two visiting the particular hotel). I tried to interview the owner as well but he refused, claiming that he is not involved in the business of the hotel and directing me to the vice-president of his company, who eventually gave me an interview later on.

Given the distance from Nicosia to Paphos it was not practical to commute so I rented a flat in the area and stayed there for the duration of the fieldwork. Like in the second case study, I observed the hotel both during the day and during the night and alongside the interviews I also took some observational field-notes. The reactions I provoked from the staff of the hotel varied. Like in the previous case studies, however, the situation improved as the research progressed. Similarly to the previous hotels, some interviews were long and detailed and others short and brief. In this hotel the proportion of the unrecorded interviews was bigger as more people refused to be recorded and more people could not leave their work-posts unattended so as to sit down and have a ‘proper’ interview. My original expectation that unrecorded interviews are bound to be more informative than recorded ones proved correct.

The fact that I was spending a long time every day in the hotel raised the issue of my positionality much more starkly than in the previous hotels. I socialised much more with the workers in this hotel, ate a couple of times with some of them in the staff canteen and interacted repeatedly with others. To be sure, I remained an outsider with respect to the staff of the hotel and some of them pointed out to me that I had to work for some time in the hotel before attempting to write a book about it. Some, like in the previous hotels, commented that my research job was a nice one, hinting that I am lucky to have

such 'a job'. Some proceeded to ask who pays me, how much and why, and I was more than happy to respond. On two occasions, when the interviewees hesitated to tell me the size of their monthly income, I persuaded them to give me that information by telling them the size of mine. The difference in educational levels (me being a post-graduate and the immense majority of my interviewees having had only secondary education) created some distance in our interactions which I tried to minimise, but this was at some times beyond my ability. On the one hand, I observed some status-related respect, on the other hand, I also felt some sort of subterranean antagonism (possibly a consequence of real and perceived class differentiation). I think that overall the impression of the hotel employees about me was generally positive. However, I was always the guy with the notebooks and the tape recorder – not the tray or the sheets, or the toolbox, and that definitely and inevitably constrained both the mutuality of the interaction and the depth of the information exchange.

### 2.3.2. The banks

Following up on the study of the three hospitality industry case studies, a traditional as well as labour-intensive industry, I decided to turn my attention to the other traditional and recently rapidly expanding industry, that is banking. Although it is offshore banking that signifies most the rapidity of the sector's expansion, as far as labour relations are concerned it is more appropriate to investigate retail banking, since that is the labour-intensive part of the industry and the most significant in terms of employment. Work in the banking industry is very different to work in the tourism industry. Bank employees have one of the strongest trade unions in the island and their sectoral collective agreement, which stipulates a series of rights and benefits, is strictly enforced. Salaries are much higher, most employees have academic or professional university degrees and it is essentially white-collar work which is primarily considered skilled or semi-skilled. There are, however, also some common features, such as the contact with customers and hence the more specific social skills which are required for this.

What does flexibility and flexibilisation mean in the banking industry, where labour relations are more strictly and firmly regulated? What is the function and structure of trade union activity and to what extent does trade unionism determine the conduct of labour relations? What sort of management decisions are taken at shop-floor level and what sort of decisions are taken at central offices level? Or what is the relative power of the departmental/middle managers? What are the criteria for employment

in the sector and what is the labour force structure like? What is the frequency and significance of training and qualifications regarding transfers and promotions? And, finally, do gender and ethnicity have a role in the structuring of employment relations?

Unlike hotel companies, banking companies do not belong to single individual capitalists and the ‘big boss’ notion cannot be personalised – here the management rules on behalf of a shareholding group of investors. The employer is less of an agency and more of a structural entity. Banks have elaborate industrial relations systems and labour issues are usually dealt with centrally. Hence my research project started by contacting the Human Resource Department of a big private bank. They asked for written confirmation that I was indeed a PhD student affiliated with the Cyprus Research Centre. After securing the necessary documentation I went for an initial interview, where I was the interviewee having to answer some questions about my research. Then I was given a list of names of branch managers to contact. I went to a relatively big branch and after an interview with the branch manager I started talking to the staff, asking for interviews. The climate was not as pleasant as it was when I was examining the hotels. In the banks I was truly an outsider and I felt it. This was probably because the bank employees gave me much less attention and obviously did not comment amongst themselves about my presence there. In the hotels I had the impression that I was a somebody doing serious work. In the bank the impression I had was of a youngster doing a school assignment. This was perhaps indicative of the differential status characterising work in the two industries. Like in the hotel industry case studies, however, things improved as the research progressed. Some interviews were brief, some were detailed, all of them recorded as nobody objected to this. The technical dimension of the work performed in the banks was largely outside the scope of the research. The interviews, like in the hotel industry case studies, were semi-structured and the amount of information gathered varied from person to person. Some were talkative and open, others were not. Some employees were reserved, but most of them seemed much more confident and secure to talk to me about their work as well as about their employers.

For intra-sectoral comparative purposes I decided to investigate the ‘other’ very popular banking sector in Cyprus, that is the co-operative one, and identify potential differences in labour relations. The Cooperative Central Bank (CCB) was at the intersection of the cooperative movement, on the one hand, and the banking industry, on the other. Before I went to investigate employment in the CCB I

read about its historical development in order to understand potential differences in the logic of operation vis-à-vis the private bank.

The CCB was established by the colonial authorities in the late 1930s in an attempt to co-ordinate, consolidate and strengthen the cooperative movement, which was rapidly expanding in the late colonial period. Following the failure of the Agricultural Bank to perform that role a decade earlier, the CCB was established on a firmer basis with its capital being owned by its member societies. Its membership was originally restricted to the best performing cooperative credit societies, whose surplus funds constituted the most important funding source of the bank. The achievement of economies of scale, the elimination of moneylenders, the familiarisation of the farmers with the holding of cash and the practising of thrift are the main social benefits that can be attributed to co-operativism. The CCP, as the bank of the cooperative banks, acted as the intermediary in the recycling of funds from societies in surplus to societies in deficit. Moreover, the CCB became the main provider of fertilisers and insecticides for the Cypriot countryside (Phylaktis, 1995).

The CCB entered a state of continuous crisis following the war of 1974 as it suffered a loss of £3.6 million while it carried debts of borrowers affected by the invasion totalling £18 million at a time when its assets stood at £31 million. As a result of the reconstruction needs of the Greek-Cypriot society the CCB started giving out bigger loans than were justified by its deposits, leading to a deterioration of its liquidity position. As a consequence the CCB had to resort to the government for financial assistance (Phylaktis, 1995). The cooperative movement as a whole enjoys income and corporation tax exemption as well as a relative independence from the directions and control of the Central Bank of the Republic since it is controlled by the Office of Control of Cooperative Development, which has replaced the colonial Department of Cooperation. Over the last decades, however, and in conjunction with the process of Cyprus's entry into the EU, the cooperative movement and the CCB have begun to be treated more like commercial banks. This means that their transactions with non-members are now taxed and that the competitive climate in which they now operate has induced them to proceed to mergers in order to create bigger and thus more viable cooperative credit societies. The CCB oversees this process of merging through the establishment of the Central Cooperative Agency, which coordinates the merging processes.

I first visited the personnel manager's office and had my first interview with him. He gave me his permission to conduct my research and was quite helpful. He used to be a trade unionist before becoming a personnel manager. Conducting the research in the CCB was as difficult as in the private bank at both central and branch level since departmental managers as well as their staff were often busy and reluctant to allow me bother them with interviews. On the other hand, however, the fact that all the staff was concentrated in one building made the research an easier project in comparison to the previous private bank. Most importantly, the smaller size of CCB allowed me to interview staff from many departments and services, something which was impossible, given time and scope restrictions, in the private bank. Like in the other case studies, things improved as the research progressed, since both my knowledge about and familiarity with the bank employees expanded. All interviews were recorded, some were short and brief, others were long and detailed. Building on the information gathered from the fourth case study, the fifth case study was completed in less than three weeks.

### 2.3.3. The construction sites

No serious labour relations study can afford to exclude construction from its focus. Cyprus, both north and south of the green line, ultimately resembles a big construction site. As an industry, construction is at the heart of the economy, making up most of its secondary sector. It is also the sector with the most significant informal and illegal labour employment practices. It is an industry with strong trade unions, yet at the same time an industry where collective agreements are being systematically violated, especially for the ethnic minority workers, immigrants and Turkish Cypriots alike. As a sector, construction encompasses a range of occupations: office workers, civil and mechanical engineers, electricians, iron workers, forming block workers, builders, painters, unskilled workers etc. Hence an investigation into the labour relations of the industry can provide broader insights regarding many occupational categories. The timing of my fieldwork coincided with the renewal of the sectoral collective agreement and the tensions that accompanied it. On the one hand, the trade unions demanded the immediate renewal of the collective agreement and the securing of some basic economic grievances while, on the other hand, the employers demanded the extension of subcontracting as a precondition for the renewal of the collective agreement. The issue was still pending at the time, with the trade unions threatening to strike. The Ministry of Labour had called both parties to start negotiations. Eventually there was a compromise reached that the two issues were to be discussed simultaneously. Hence the



sectoral collective agreement was renewed and a memorandum concerning the process of subcontracting was agreed whereupon the sub-contractor was to be bound to the enforcement of the sectoral collective agreement for subcontract workers (Soumeli, 2008a; Papanikolaou, 2008).

I decided to start with a big, unionised firm in order to gain a picture of the ‘traditional’ industrial relations system before moving to the examination of unregulated and non-unionised labour. After two interviews with trade unionists of the two main trade unions, PEO and SEK, I made a list of the big unionised and the big non-unionised firms and started telephoning them. After two rejections I managed to find a firm that was prepared to allow me to carry out research in their premises. This firm is constructing both public and private works: roads, building complexes, blocks of flats etc. As a big corporation it manages to secure important contracts from the state. It employs about 200 people directly and many more indirectly through sub-contracting arrangements. It was the basic firm responsible for mega projects such as the building of the Nicosia General Hospital and the expansion of the Larnaca airport. At the time of my fieldwork it also had many other big construction sites in Nicosia and I chose to investigate labour relations in its biggest block of flats project in the city. This was a thirteen-floor building in the heart of Nicosia, with a lot of people working there on a daily basis.

Gaining access and conducting the research was more difficult in this case study in comparison to the previous ones. I started by interviewing the director's executive secretary who was also the ‘office and personnel manager’. She gave me introductory information about the firm and its activities but the impression I got was that, unlike the banks, there was no established industrial relations system here. The personnel of the firm was in any case divided into two segments: the office workers and the construction site workers. There were two separate collective agreements and the one concerning the construction workers took precedence over the one concerning the office workers, in the sense that once the former was agreed, the latter usually followed without any further negotiations, as I was informed.

Although I got clear permission from the office and personnel manager to conduct the research in the construction site, things were not so simple when I actually went there. I had to take a series of permissions from the engineers, the foremen as well as the individual subcontractors before attempting to take any interviews. More importantly, I could not approach most of the iron workers, who were

Romanian and could not speak English at all. From my observation, their Pontian supervisor communicated with them with signs, a language in which it was impossible to have interviews. Hence the information about their work was restricted to what I was told by their supervisor. However, I also managed to interview a young Pontian iron worker who worked temporarily with them and told me a few more interesting things about them. The other problem that I encountered was with the forming blocks subcontractor who did not let me take more than two interviews from his group and hid from me the fact that he was employing one Pakistani worker. I interviewed him first and he told me that he was employing only Pontians and one Greek youngster. When I went there the following day, however, and started chatting informally with his workers, I was informed that one of them was Pakistani – that is a third country national requiring a special work permit, which I presumed he probably lacked. The other difference from the previous case studies was the non-use of a tape recorder. I took all the interviews informally, either standing by and talking to the workers while they were working or seated in the staff room and taking notes.

Finding a second construction industry firm, smaller and non-unionised for the purposes of comparison with the sixth case study, was not an easy endeavour. I spent one week telephoning more than 30 middle-sized companies and the response was negative. Some said that they simply refused to allow me to talk to their workers, others said that I was bound to waste their time, one specifically told me that his employees are so busy that they do not even have time to go to the toilet. Some asked me questions about the purposes of my research and my funding, to which I responded, taking up the role of the student without hiding my connection with the Cyprus Research Centre. This, on the one hand, raised my status as a serious researcher, yet on the other hand alienated me as someone to whom information should be restricted, e.g. about illegal workers. The student role was easier and more modest but I ran the risk and eventually experienced being ignored. Eventually one firm of class C (experience A), according to the Council of Registration and Control of Construction and Technical Works, January 2007, responded positively to my request. I got an appointment with the owner/manager's daughter running the company office.

Once I started the research in the premises of this company, I did not face any significant problems in the sense that I did not get any flat rejections, like in the previous case study. Talking with the two office workers, a daughter and a nephew of the owner-director, was not very helpful. Although I was

introduced to the scope of the firm's operations, the information I got about the actual labour process in the firm was limited. In any case the office was too small, the significant issues were bound to be found at the construction site. There I first interviewed the son-in-law of the owner-director, getting also his permission for more interviews. He was not very helpful either and was very brief in his answers. This might have been because the interview took place in the presence of others, foremen and engineers, employees and also – with one exception – relatives of the boss. Talking with the workers, both direct and subcontract, was not easy since they were typically busy and usually reluctant to talk to a stranger asking them questions about their work. However, as I spent more and more time at the workplace, I was able to gather enough information to write notes about it.

#### 2.4. Experience, fieldwork data and writing up

After the completion of each case study I prepared a report describing both the process of data collection / production and the main analytic themes that emerged out of each case study. Each report was building on the previous one and by the end of the fieldwork, I already had the main body for writing up this methodological chapter. What I noticed immediately was the ‘apologetic caution’ with which I was narrating the story (Franzosi, 1995 p.189), conscious as I was that the few workplaces that I had observed could not possibly hold the weight of grand generalisations about the labour process in Cyprus as a whole. At the end of the day, what I had observed might have been merely some tendencies amongst others, particularities of the firm, or the area or even exceptions as opposed to rules of each industry. On the other hand, there is no reason not to see 2-3 examples of workplace conditions, relations and dynamics as illustrative or at least indicative of broader sectoral or even national labour relations. Discussing my preliminary findings with colleagues and a second shorter round of informal expert interviews allowed me to clarify things in my head and acquire some needed confidence for the writing up stage.

Meanwhile I got a part-time teaching job in a private college on an hourly paid basis, receiving a basic income as my funding had expired. This was my second ‘proper’ job, the first being a research job in 2005 at the Cyprus Research Centre. Back then, when I was formulating the research proposal for this PhD thesis, a colleague doing administrative work had commented to me. ‘*How can you study labour relations without having substantial employment experience?*’. This question, and most importantly its

political version or implication – the study of the working class that is from the outside, or the inevitable social distance between the worker and the intellectual – has troubled me throughout this research project. I will attempt a tentative answer to this issue through a short biographical note in order to specify more clearly my ontology in this endeavour.

My father, who comes from a poor family, left his village in Paphos district in the early 1970s and moved to Nicosia while my mother also had to move to Nicosia as a result of the 1974 war, during which her village passed under the control of the Turkish army. Both of them became early on in their lives civil servants and thus managed gradually to raise themselves above the socio-economic condition of the rest of their families, acquiring permanent and relatively well paid jobs<sup>39</sup>. Their labour aristocratic position allowed them to make decent savings, managing to both own their flat and then their house as well as offer to both their children a good and expensive education, something that their families could not provide for them.

The concept of ‘*class*’ has always puzzled me as far back as I can remember – from the communist ramblings of my old grandfather in the 1980s who insisted that ‘*the hammer and the sickle will bring universal equality*’, through to my first readings of Marxist literature during my teenage-hood in the 1990s and my activist and student years in London in the 2000s. In my primary school in a proletarian area of Nicosia I was one of the few privileged ones to have civil servant parents. In my secondary English – speaking school, situated next to the presidential Palace and constituting an elite and bourgeois institution, I was one of the few less privileged ones to come from non-wealthy families. By the time of my university years in London I was fully conscious of the fact that it was my parents' petty bourgeois life condition that allowed me to be there in the first place – even if my choice of topics to study and causes to fight for was probably more informed by my grandfather's dictum. During the summers I used to work for my cousins who were doing construction work in order to make some pocket money. I came to experience how physically exhausting manual work is and socialised and interacted with young and older workers. I found out the many small tricks and short cuts workers devised in order to save time and energy, often at the expense of safety but skillfully avoiding the intensification of work and using every opportunity to rest their bodies. One summer I also worked as a delivery boy driving a motor bike for a multinational fast food chain. There I learnt not only the

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<sup>39</sup> For the continuing significance of employment in the derivation of class see Crompton, 2010.

significance of tipping for front line workers, but also saw first hand the extent of the exploitation of the immigrant Asian back-stage workers in the kitchen who were working long hours, were paid very little and charged a lot for poor and crowded accommodation offered to them by their employer. It was there that I started thinking about and discussing with a colleague the potentiality of forming a food delivery workers' trade union. Before getting the research job in 2005 I also worked as a courier but could not take it for more than two months as the pay was too little and the motor-bike driving in a busy city with heavy traffic too dangerous and unhealthy.

My research job in 2005-2006 in the public sector and more recently my teaching job in the private sector in 2009-2010 allowed me to see from a different position the operation of the knowledge industry in both its production and circulation stages. I have had an office to work in, a research task to fulfill and a director to report to; I have had classes of students to lecture to, colleagues to work with and a profit-making employer. Although a knowledge worker with the traditionally esteemed teacher occupation, my part-time status and my currently relatively low wage rate not only does not allow me to assume a middle class or labour aristocratic socio-economic position but puts me squarely within the ranks of the precarious workers. To be sure, my post graduate education as well as my petty bourgeois background probably means that I have the potential for upward socio-economic mobility, something that many other precarious workers do not – yet for the time being, and in a knowledge society such as 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cyprus, the distance between the intellectual and the proletarian experience is actually much less than it originally seems.

Moving back to epistemology and to the utilisation of the data generated in the fieldwork I have two more points to make before starting the substantive part of the thesis. The selective references to the interviews taken in the context of substantiating the argument should not be seen as strictly representative but as indicative. I took more than 200 interviews, formal as well as informal, recorded as well as unrecorded – yet I only refer to a few dozen. This does not mean that the rest were useless – in fact most of them were necessary both in the identification of important themes and in allowing me to gain experience in interview taking and interacting with workers. Interviews, as far as knowledge is concerned, were cumulative for me – giving me the opportunity to build as the research progressed. Furthermore, the selection of quotations used, although inevitably and irreducibly subjective, should not be seen as arbitrary as it was based on an evaluation of their correspondance and relevance to the

workplace reality observed in general during the case studies and not to any pre-ordained effort to prove a set of a priori assumptions or a specific theoretical position or model.

The structuring of the thesis and the eventual thematic division into the chapters was both a continuously worked and re-worked task and part of the method of analysis. This is because the constant thinking and rethinking of the structure of the thesis allowed me and led to the reading of the data generated from different angles and perspectives. I started with the micro-macro duality assigning some chapters to the ‘character of work’ and some to the ‘class structure’, then I thought in terms of organisational and political processes such as ‘flexibilisation’ ‘gendering and ethnicisation’, and ‘class mobilisation’ leaving the micro-macro distinction at the background. In this manner I managed to allocate my data into categories. However, I soon discovered that this was opening up the scope rather than specifying it and driving me towards the territory of theory. No, I said to myself, this is an empirical study and its structure should be constructed strictly according to its method and data: three parts, each corresponding to an industry, 7 chapters each corresponding to a case study. I soon discovered that this was problematic as well – too much background would have been needed and the validations and generalisations would have probably been too weak.

Eventually I opted for an integrated approach in the reading and selection of what is important from the data, nevertheless one that stood on solid axes serving as both as a compass and as the basic coordinates: employment, trade unionism, hierarchy and power. The choice of these categories as the central organising concepts of the thesis anchoring the analytic themes and structuring the content allowed me both to overcome difficulties and contradictions such as the variance between rhetoric and practice concerning flexibility or class struggle and circumvent gaps in the data such as absence or unreliability of statistics or hidden, untold or whispered information about illegal or unacceptable practices. The picture emerging from each workplace field work data was also compared, contrasted, cross validated and reinforced with expert interviews, published as well as some unpublished articles and documents that I managed to get hold of through some contacts. The attempt that follows in the next chapters is to give a picture of the labour conditions as a whole in the three industries studied as well as some brief references to other industries and thus construct a sketch of labour relations and class composition in Cyprus as a whole.

## **CHAPTER THREE: The deregulation of employment relations**

### **3.1. The erosion of collective bargaining**

Collective bargaining and collective agreements constitute the central pillar of the voluntarist labour relations system in Cyprus. Collective bargaining is decentralised in Cyprus and takes place at the sectoral and the enterprise levels and constitutes the primary mechanism for the regulation of industrial relations in the context set by the provisions of the 1977 Industrial Relations Code. In 2003 there were 13 sectoral agreements and around 450 at enterprise level in the private sector while in 2008 there were 17 sectoral agreements and around 400 at enterprise level (Soumeli, 2005, 2009b). Although there are no agreed and reliable data today with respect to the coverage of collective bargaining, it is generally accepted that there is a decreasing tendency in the last years. This affects some industries more than others and consists of an essentially private sector phenomenon, although it does appear in the broader public sector, alongside outsourcing practices and temporary employment increase. This coincides with the generally falling trade union density as the numerical expansion of trade union membership remains much lower than the expansion of the labour market.

The institution of the collective agreement and the Industrial Relations Code which sets the political and the procedural framework in which this occurs, not only reflects but also rests essentially upon an equilibrium, real or perceived, between different social forces. Although formally and officially collective agreements constitute gentlemen's agreements and not state law, their treatment by the state as well as the social partners in the 1980s and 1990s allowed them to develop a quasi customary-legal status. The mutual stake-holding consent and the participatory (and broadly moderate and conciliatory) stance of both employers and trade unions allowed the institution of the collective agreement to be treated by the state as the primary regulatory mechanism of industrial relations (Christodoulou, 2009 p. 35-41) which in theory covers all those concerned at each level. In practice there is no mechanism to impose the collective agreement even to those who are covered by it, let alone the rest of each industry (Soumeli, 2009b). The complaint by the trade unions that some employers violate systematically the collective agreements, has become a staple especially during the last years.

#### **3.1.1. The refusal to make or recognise collective agreements**

There are many cases where the employers simply refuse to sign a collective agreement with the trade unions or recognise and abide by an existing sectoral one. This phenomenon is more pronounced in sectors where there are low unionisation rates such as retail trade and catering. Very few retail trade and catering workers remain trade union members today as new and younger ones in the industry tend to be immigrants and students, social groups that are more reluctant and resistant to unionisation. The facts that many enterprises in these sectors are family businesses employing primarily family members, most of the employees are temporary and most enterprises are too small for the trade unions to bother to recruit (or for employees to bother to invite them) renders the non-unionised segment of the industry to be big and expanding. Even in cases, however, of big firms and big workplaces in retail trade, workers and trade unions find it very difficult to meet each other and demand and win collective agreements. The abortive unionisation attempt of a big and expanding Cypriot supermarket chain in 2006 is illustrative of this.<sup>40</sup>

However, even in sectors with high levels of unionisation, such as the hospitality and the construction industries, there are employers who do not recognise the sectoral collective agreement and ignore the trade unions to the extent that they are even prepared to withdraw from the employers' organisation in order not to have to abide by them. In the first case study, of a hotel in Larnaca, this is exactly what has been happening since the 1999 strike. In the last case study, of a medium-size construction firm in Nicosia, something similar has happened as at one point in the 1990s the two partners split up and the one who remained in the business employed people outside the framework of the sectoral collective agreement and discouraged his employees from joining unions.<sup>41</sup> However, even in such cases the sectoral collective agreement serves as an unspoken reference point for the determination of,<sup>42</sup> or at least the demand for, wage rates and working conditions, at least for older and better positioned workers. Departmental managers, for example, in the first case study knew exactly how much more they would have been entitled to if they had been under the sectoral collective agreement and were demanding it from time to time from their management.<sup>43</sup>

The sheer power of the employer *vis-à-vis* the employees, especially semi-skilled and unskilled ones, both real and perceived, often prevents workers from demanding their rights and benefits deriving not only from the collective agreements but also from labour law itself. For many workers

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<sup>40</sup> Trade unionists from PEO and SEK informed me that the attempt failed as the employer's intransigence made many workers eventually back down.

<sup>41</sup> Skilled construction worker, case study 7

<sup>42</sup> Foreman, case study 7.

<sup>43</sup> Accounts office manager, case study 1.



desperately looking for a job it is unthinkable once they find one actually to make demands to their employer such as to bring the unions and the collective agreement in a non-unionised firm. It is usually enough for the employer or the manager to hint that he does not want trouble (meaning trade unions) in his premises to prevent workers from embarking upon such thoughts. In cases where the employer's anti-union and anti collective agreement stance is challenged, usually by a segment of the labour force, some employers develop a new line of defence. The cases of a big toy store in 2008 and a medium size restaurant chain in 2009 are illustrative. There, a significant number of workers joined PEO and SEK in the first case and PEO only in the second case and started demanding an enterprise collective agreement in the first case and recognition of the sectoral collective agreement in the other. The employers' original refusal to accept either trade unionism or collective bargaining and collective agreements changed once the workers started striking to a counter proposal for a company union and a company collective agreement that had no relation whatsoever with PEO or SEK. This was not accepted by the workers who continued their strikes until eventually they lost. The strategy of the company union was implemented in the case study 1 hotel after the end of the 1999 strike.

### 3.1.2. The evasion or exclusion of workers from existing collective agreements

The erosion of collective bargaining does not come only from without, that is through the decrease of workplaces and firms that recognise or are willing to make a collective agreement with their staff. It also takes the form of segmenting a workplace and a firm's labour force into a group employed according to the terms of the collective agreement and another one that is not. Although trade unionists are never too tired to talk about the collective agreements whose enforcement is both necessary and obligatory, they are neither too adamant to pressurise the employers nor particularly successful when they do attempt to do so. In practice if somebody is not a trade union member it is often unlikely that the employer will stick to the collective agreement. This was observed in case studies 2 and 3 in the hotel industry where there was a divided labour force – a core employed under the terms of the sectoral collective agreement and some who were employed under a regime of contracts on an individual basis. According to trade unionists it is almost impossible to find a hotel which fully abides by the sectoral collective agreement – while it is possible and easy to find a hotel which does not abide by it at all. This is because there are no fully unionised hotels, unlike many private bank branches or some big construction companies, which are fully unionised. The dichotomy between organised and un-organised workers is both inter as well as intra firm. Hence the question of collective bargaining and collective agreement coverage is both difficult to measure

as well as expand. The evasion or the exclusion of workers from collective agreements relativises them as regulation mechanisms and leads to hybrid workplaces and dual or multiple terms and conditions of employment.

It is interesting to examine this relativisation of the sectoral collective agreement in the hospitality industry more closely. This was clearly the case in case studies 2 and 3 which, although they are workplaces of different size and in a different area, demonstrate a tendency which can be seen to be generalisable. In both these hotels, there is a segment of the labour force, usually older employees both in terms of age and tenure, who are unionised and employed under the terms of the sectoral collective agreement and another un-unionised group of newer and younger workers, often migrant, who are employed on the basis of personal contracts. More importantly, the policy is that most new recruits to both these hotels are appointed only on an individual basis by means of a personal contract, that is, by-passing the trade unions and the sectoral collective agreement. Hence, if this current tendency is not reversed, in the future the un-unionised segment employed on an individual basis is expected to grow at the expense of the unionised segment, leading to further *de facto* deregulation and individualisation of labour relations in the hospitality industry.

Let us see this through the words of the workers:

*'At some point they started pushing us to accept fixed wages. We resisted at the beginning, but gradually it happened. I have been employed with a fixed wage since 2000... Today nobody will employ you according to the sectoral collective agreement'.<sup>44</sup>(Assistant barman, case study 2)*

*'I am working on a part-time basis here. My full time job is at hotel X. There I am employed according to the sectoral collective agreement. They offered me a personal contract but I refused'. (Pastry worker, case study 2)*

*'In the last two years everybody is hired with fixed salaries... they say to you, I offer you so and so. If you do not accept I will hire an immigrant in your place'. (Chef de partie, case study 3)*

*'I am employed under a fixed wage. I prefer it that way because my wage is stable all year through'. (Dispense barman, case study 3)*

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<sup>44</sup> A personal contract is known as a fixed salary in the hospitality industry since these workers are excluded from the points system (details of this follow) which makes salaries variable according to the hotel's monthly sales.

### 3.2. Personal contracts

One basic research question then is why employers prefer personal contracts and why employees accept them. Whereas for employees it is rarely a matter of choice, there seem to be a variety of reasons for employers' preference for 'fixed salaries' as they are commonly known in the industry. There are organisational and logistic factors at work here and more importantly implications in matters of both authority and economy. Whereas managers emphasise the convenience and practicality<sup>45</sup> of 'fixed salaries', both they and their staff are well aware of the monetary and political rationale behind personal contracts.

#### 3.2.1. Flexibility for employers

First is the duration of employment or, from the managers' point of view, the numerical flexibility of the firm's staff. Personal contracts are usually of 6-month or 12-month duration and are renewed, usually automatically, if the management is satisfied. These contracts usually have different starting (and hence ending) points and thus give managers the opportunity to plan ahead the numerical composition of their staff by choosing when to fire (meaning from a formally legalistic perspective not to renew the labour contract) and when to hire an employee (start a new contract). In case study 3, one segment of the hotel's staff, what can be termed as the semi-periphery, is thus neither permanent nor temporary. It is not uncommon to find employees working for years under this regime of permanent temporariness.<sup>46</sup> This semi-peripheral position is distinct from both the position of those within the permanent core and the position of those within the temporary periphery who are employed on a more or less casual and seasonal basis.<sup>47</sup> Being on a contract of fixed term might give an impression of certainty for an employee as he/she can plan ahead a potential job change. But in reality this unclear, middle, grey position between the indefinite term of the core workers (whether according to the collective agreement or the personal contract) meaning permanence for sure, or the indefinite term of the peripheral workers, meaning temporariness for sure, can be the most difficult to grapple with. It is one thing to know that one is permanent and can thus focus on one's career within the firm, or temporary and may thus focus on finding and moving to another employer, and another to be unsure whether one would stay or not stay in the current job.

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<sup>45</sup> Hotel manager, case study 3, Human resource manager, case study 2

<sup>46</sup> This was also the case for most of the staff of the hotel of case study 1. In the words of the head barman: 'It is not clear who is permanent and who is not'.

<sup>47</sup> The hotel of case study 2 is an interesting example revealing the sharp dichotomy between the core and the periphery. In contrast, the hotels in case studies 1 and 3 had large semi-peripheries leading to a more smooth variation in the employment regimes of their labour force.

The personal contract can also be potentially functional in laying off highly paid staff in middle management positions. When employers hire or promote workers in middle management positions they are more often insisting that these employees are not to be included in the collective agreement and ideally should not even be union members. Although the law specifies compensation rates for the termination of employment in cases of unfair dismissal according to the years of service, if one's say 2-year or 3-year contract expires and is simply not renewed there is little ground to argue for unfair dismissal. In practice it is both difficult to establish in legal terms 'unfair dismissal' and compensation rates to be decided can be an uncertain process as employers and employees / trade unions usually disagree with respect to the obligation of the employer to compensate the employee who is being laid off and ultimately it is up to the judge of the labour court (with considerable delay) to decide the right and extent of a potential compensation. Compromise out-of-court settlement is a usual practice.<sup>48</sup>

Second is the equalisation of the cost of working time effected through the fixed salaries. Employees who receive a fixed salary usually are not entitled to extra pay (neither in money nor in time off terms) for Sunday and public holiday work. In practice the employees who are on fixed salaries tend to work frequently on Sundays and public holidays as their colleagues who are under the regime of the sectoral collective agreement are more expensive (during that time) for the employer and are thus usually assigned to work on weekdays<sup>49</sup>. In hybrid contexts like case studies 2 and 3 this can be and has been a matter of conflict within the staff as there is not really a rotation of holiday work. Fixed salaries also stabilise hospitality workers' income around the year, which otherwise – because of the service charge distribution system – (see below) is unbalanced, higher in the summer than the winter.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with a lawyer dealing amongst others with labour cases. OEB's 2004 annual report states that out of 1745 applications to the labour court in 2003, 114 were withdrawn or settled out of the court. In my fieldwork, I discovered two such examples. The first concerned the *maitre d'hotel* of case study 3, who was to be laid off as the hotel's manager informed me, with the company offering him an out of court settlement that he could not refuse. In case study 4 the cleaning supervisor narrated to me her previous employment case of a legal battle after she was fired from her position of housekeeper in a hotel, a work-post she had held for many years. As she vividly explained. 'I used to go to court alone. Nobody was there for me. I felt like a criminal. So I settled with £6000 from the firm'.

<sup>49</sup> In an interesting announcement by the hotel managers association in Politis (27/10/2009) it was argued that flexible labour should be a combination of rotating, part time and on call employment.

<sup>50</sup> In the winter some hotels stay open and function with fewer tourists and fewer employees and some close altogether. Workers are given their days off as well as their holidays in the winter and if this does not cover the period when they are not needed by the employer they are led to the unemployment benefit with a tacit understanding that they will be re-hired next year. In cases where the unemployment benefit is not sufficient some workers are led to other undeclared work in other sectors such as, for example, construction.

Third is the non-clarification of the work duties on the employment contract and the utilisation of labour power in variable posts according to shifting employer demands or preferences. This concerns primarily the casual and the seasonal staff, who are allocated according to employer needs – deriving for example from arranged wedding receptions, conferences, short notice group arrivals etc. Having said that, however, does not mean that functional flexibility is the norm in the industry. Far from it. In fact most employees are assigned to specific posts and are expected to remain there for most of their career – specialising in each different function and the associated use of corresponding technical means and instruments and thus learning to work productively – that is both quickly and effectively. However, the lack of clarity with respect to the actual job description (that is usually absent from the contract) does lead to misunderstandings and tensions.

Fourth is the linking of future pay raises to individual performance / productivity, as those who are on fixed salaries are excluded from the yearly wage raises and sometimes even from the automatic cost of living adjustment (COLA). Thus, with the institution of personal contracts, it is up to the managers/employers to decide if the specific employee ‘deserves’<sup>51</sup> a wage raise, leaving the years of service usually out of the equation. In any case, employer's increased power over the distribution, size and frequency of wage raises, is also accepted or supported by some workers – those that see themselves as candidates for upward mobility either because of their economic performance or because of their ‘proper’ stance which of course implies adopting a managerial and careerist perspective.

Although the above examples focus on the hospitality industry, the personal contract of employment is found in many sectors and industries and its rationale is more or less the same. Flexibility for employers is interpreted as a new and increased freedom from old customary labour regulation means which restrict them both in employment and work practices. And individualisation of contractual relations is usually both a means and an end in this striving for more flexibility. In construction personal contracts, which are usually oral and open ended, are used by some firms exclusively or relatively for more or less the same reasons as in the hospitality industry – to adjust the size of their labour force more conveniently, to reduce the total cost, to blur distinctions between different types of work and skills and to adjust pay to individual performance. However, the key means by which individualisation and flexibility are enforced in the construction industry is the subcontracting network. Big construction companies, despite their political discourse of flexibility, tend more or less to abide by the collective agreements for their direct workers in letter or at least in

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<sup>51</sup> Assistant firm director, case study 3.

spirit – passing essentially the role of actually enforcing ‘employer's flexibility’ to their subcontractors. As mentioned above, some workers do prefer individualised work arrangements – nevertheless in the existing context of market hierarchies and unequal power relations it is unlikely that personal contracts, especially in the long run, come out to be beneficial to workers.

### 3.2.2. Inability of a trade union response

Personal contracts usually provide for worse terms and conditions than the sectoral collective agreement. Hence they constitute a violation of that agreement. As such they are opposed by the trade unions. However the matter is not always so straight forward. Sometimes the personal contract might offer a slightly higher salary but little if any direct extra benefits such as higher overtime or holiday pay and little if any contribution to non-compulsory funds. Often both the employer and the employee can benefit from mutual avoidance of dues to welfare funds or trade union subscription money. On the one hand, sometimes it is matter of interpretation which arrangement is better; on the other hand, there is always the issue of interpretation whether a personal contract is voluntary for the worker or not. In any case, according to the OEB's lawyer, personal contracts constitute legal documents which override the sectoral collective agreement. Similarly, according to the Labour Ministry, personal contracts constitute a right of the two parties, something which cannot be prevented because of the existence of a political arrangement such as the collective agreement. On the other hand, there is a generalised – often rhetorical – acceptance of the trade union position that personal contracts should be guided by collective agreements, if not being better than them. On a practical basis, since personal contracts offering worse employment terms affect primarily non-Cypriots, trade unions do not take the matter seriously enough. Often they do not even bother to inform the Labour Ministry and ask from the workers who complain to do so. However, even if a complaint is filed, the slow work pace of the civil service practically means that the case will be examined at best many months later and in the mean time the seasonal employee would have probably already left the country.

Personal contracts, however, do not only constitute a violation of the collective agreement, but also of 'the service charge' system, which is technically speaking legally binding. According to labour law (1968/2009), 10% of the hotel's monthly sales should be distributed to the staff according to a system of points. Hence, at the end of the month, after V.A.T. is subtracted from the sales, 10% of the amount collected is put aside. 5% of that is kept by the hotel for wear and tear purposes and the rest is divided by the number of points entitled to the staff collectively. In this way the price of the

point is established every month. Each person may be entitled to 2-10 points according to his/her position. A waiter B, for example, is entitled to 7 points whereas a technician B is entitled to 3 points. The extra income for each employee can be calculated by multiplying the number of the points he/she is entitled to by the price of the point which varies according to the monthly sales.

From all three hotel industry case studies it is obvious that employers have found a means to circumvent the points system, apparently with the approval of the Labour Ministry through the so-called 'estimated point price', postponing the adjustment of the estimated (and actually paid) price point and the real one to the future, taking full advantage of the seasonality dimension which often allows them to not pay the difference. Broadly speaking, during my fieldwork I observed many violations of Cypriot and EU labour law (concerning working time, overtime, holidays etc.) which never reach the Labour Ministry for a proper investigation. For this situation, beyond the employers and the Labour Ministry, both the workers and their organisations are responsible for tolerating *de facto* by not acting upon such violations. Especially since both workers and trade unionists are often complaining of the employers' 'stealing' the employees' service charge money, yet do nothing about it. Trade unionists respond by saying that it is difficult to prove this as employers keep double accounts, that the employees themselves need to go to the labour court and are too afraid and hesitant to do so, and that all they can do is complain to the Labour Ministry, which in any case has not enough inspectors to implement systematic checks. Although all this is valid, there was at least one case that came to my attention in 2009 where an EU worker was prepared to engage in a legal battle and it was his trade union that dissuaded him from this.<sup>52</sup>

Although some trade unionists that I interviewed admitted that they had underestimated the personal contracts phenomenon when it appeared some years ago, these same people believe that they cannot do much about it today.<sup>53</sup> A nation-wide strike demanding the abolition of existing personal contracts and the re-affirmation of the universality of the existing sectoral collective agreement is, for example, considered by the national and district union secretaries to be a very risky confrontation with little possibility of success. Trade unions hesitate to confront the employers unless they estimate that they have a good chance of success. Although this is a prudent stance, it is one which simply postpones the tackling of the issue. Given that trade union power has been gradually but steadily eroded at least over the last decade,<sup>54</sup> it seems that the longer they postpone the confrontation the more difficult it becomes to succeed. And to be sure this is a vicious circle: the more the trade unions are unable to get workers with personal contracts into trade union membership

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<sup>52</sup> Informal and off the record information.

<sup>53</sup> SEK Paphos district, hotel union secretary and PEO Paphos district, hotel union secretary

<sup>54</sup> This is examined in the next chapter.

the less they can confront the employers about the institution of personal contracts and in turn the more the trade union weakness is revealed the more workers opt for or succumb to the personal contracts.

Personal contracts can be formal and written as well as informal and oral. Even when they are written, usually the employees do not have a copy. In case studies 1 and 2 this procedure takes the form of signing a paper which is then archived. In case study 3 I was informed by the Human Resource Manager that this is because the employees sign the contract before the manager and that is why they do not have a copy. If they ask for a copy later, they are entitled to have it. However, almost nobody asks for a copy. In fact one employee from case study 3 had asked for a copy of his contract but was informed that it had been lost.<sup>55</sup> In the construction industry, personal contracts usually take the form of oral agreements about the wage, which may be a bit higher than that stipulated by the sectoral collective agreement but the employees with such individual arrangements are not entitled to the benefits derived from the sectoral collective agreement, such as higher overtime pay rates, Provident Fund, Health Fund etc.

### 3.3. Subcontracting

#### 3.3.1. Rationale

Subcontracting usually takes the form of outsourcing or externalising a specific service and from the worker's perspective it usually involves piece-work. Subcontracting is on the rise in the last decades especially in sectors such as cleaning and catering and is associated with low wages and minimal contractual obligations for the employer (Rees and Fielder, 1992; Wills, 2009); deregulated and outside collective bargaining (Soumeli, 2010a). In all three industries examined in the case studies there are specific manifestations of subcontract work. In case study 1, the management's decision to proceed to the subcontracting of housekeeping was at the heart of the battle waged in 1999 which determined the current state of labour relations.

*'The control of housekeeping is done by the hotel as if they were our employees. However they are not. They are employees of the cleaning company. The reason we did this was because the cost of housekeeping was very high. The trade unions were not prepared to compromise. You know one maid was getting more than a departmental manager. They were getting raises every year, COLA etc, in 15 years their wages became very high, it was not profitable for the hotel.'*

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<sup>55</sup> Porter, case study 3



*We asked them to accept decreases in their salary but the trade unions did not accept this. There was this conflict but the company saved a huge amount of money in the last years. Service is the same. There were some problems in the beginning but now things are better than before. We control, maids are afraid, they want to work, before they didn't care. They used the trade unions as a cover. If you asked them to work one extra day they wouldn't come and they didn't care. You know work in the hotel can be unexpected. Before we couldn't handle unexpected customers. You had to have extra persons to employ whereas now you arrange your staff according to your needs'.<sup>56</sup>*

The primary reason for proceeding to the subcontracting of housekeeping was in other words the reduction of the labour cost. Simultaneously though, the defiant stance of the trade unions raised the stakes of the confrontation and it also became a political conflict about who controls labour relations in the company.

From the workers' perspective, subcontracting serves to keep wages low and the unions out of the labour process. Cleaners in 2007, employees of the subcontract company operating at the hotel, were paid around the minimum wage, £1.85 per hour, and had no COLA increases, 13<sup>th</sup> salary or any of the other benefits their predecessors had according to the sectoral collective agreement. The situation was similar in the bank offices in case study 4. Most subcontract cleaning workers are non-Cypriot women, and reluctant to confront their employers by demanding improvements in their working conditions.<sup>57</sup>

Workers, foreign ones in particular, do not necessarily understand the divisions on the employer side between subcontractor and hotel management. The story of a young Bulgarian cleaner is illustrative of that. She came to Cyprus eight months ago through an agency placing her in a cleaning company in Nicosia. When her friend found a job in Larnaca she moved with her and asked for a job in the hotel. She later found out that her official employer was not the hotel but the subcontract company. Similarly in the construction industry, foreign workers, both EU and from 'third countries', especially those who do not speak English at all, are often unaware of the legal context of their employment arrangement and its implications as they immerse themselves in complex or even simple subcontract networks. The generalised distinction between two employment regimes that is a 'contract of employment' or a 'contract of services' (Carby-Hall,

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<sup>56</sup> Front office manager, case study 1

<sup>57</sup> Subcontract cleaning workers in case studies 1 and 4

2008 p. 77-78) is, here in Cyprus as well, ultimately difficult to establish.

Subcontracting, however, is not only about the reduction of the labour cost. It can also be seen as a factor in the wider neoliberal process of the atomisation of the working class and the retreat of collectivist and solidaristic values described by Howell (2005) and Paleologos (2006). Subcontracting is part of the broader questioning of the 'normal labour relation' which promotes the conception of the worker as a businessman of his own labour power, assuming part of the risk and part of the cost of production (Paleologos, 2006, p. 201-215). It usually involves piece-work, therefore directly linking reward to productivity. In case study 1 for example, room cleaners were paid according to the number of rooms they cleaned on a daily basis. This logic of linking reward to productivity takes various forms not only external, such as for example via sub-contracting, but also internal in the guise of decentralisation or semi-autonomisation of the firm's or the enterprise's departments. Examples in case study 3 include the washing process in the former case and the ironing process and the beach restaurant in the latter. More mild forms of managerially oriented splitting of the labour force within the workplace is through the 'competition' among departments – in order to identify and acknowledge the 'best', that is the more productive one.

### 3.3.2. Practice

In the construction industry (case studies 6 and 7) subcontracting is the major issue of contention between the employers and the trade unions. Employers want the freedom to subcontract all aspects of work and become managing contractors, coordinating the various firms and individuals as opposed to having their workers on the company payroll.<sup>58</sup> They want to pay according to the work performed as opposed to paying wages according to the time spent at work. This is rejected by the trade unions, who claim that the extension of subcontracting to include the building workers will remove the responsibility of the employing firm to abide by the sectoral collective agreement and will mean the absence of an example for the subcontractors to emulate. Trade unions see in this employer initiative an attempt to cut their costs by reducing their obligations to pay a series of benefits such as social insurance, health fund, provident fund, holiday fund etc.<sup>59</sup> Subcontracting brick-building, for example, would allow them to lay off workers and have them instead employed by somebody else according to the terms of a contract. In this way the employing firm will be able to programme and account more easily the progress made (piece by piece) while it will be saved

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<sup>58</sup> Case study 6. Interview with the Senior Director

<sup>59</sup> Interviews with trade unionists of the building industry.

from daily work management. The overseeing of the work will be done by the subcontractor directly responsible to the company project manager.

Subcontracting is fairly widespread in the industry in iron work, forming blocks work, painting work, electrical and plumbing work etc. What the trade unions reject is the extension of subcontracting to brick-laying work and general building work. The employers consider it natural as they see no particular difference in this type of work.<sup>60</sup> Trade unions, however, consider this as the central sector in which they are strong in terms of members and also consider subcontracting as an attack on their role in the industry. What would the sectoral collective agreement mean if there were no employed workers but only self-employed groups under the lead of a subcontractor? In the Cypriot-Greek slang, subcontracting is called 'kapaliatiko' a word coming from 'kapalin' which means continuously. The popular conception of subcontracting is piece-work performed continuously/ non-stop and hence more intensively. The assistant foreman in case study 6 used to work in this way before being hired by the firm, 'in the pirate way' as he said because the pressure to work harder and harder (more output per time) is induced by the employment arrangement itself. This promotes also a more careless mentality, taking almost no safety measures since they imply cost in money/time terms.

Outsourcing, the term used in the banking industry for subcontracting was initiated in the collective agreement signed in 2005 and included the functions of cleaning, mailing and security.<sup>61</sup> This was considered an important achievement by the employers since it allowed them to introduce the logic of externalising subsidiary functions and concentrating on banking functions proper. ETYK is generally in principle opposed to outsourcing as it means in practice a decrease in work-positions,<sup>62</sup> and would have probably preferred to continue restricting it. Nevertheless, in the negotiation context, more so in the banking industry than elsewhere, the employers' primarily political demands are exchanged with the primarily economic demands of the trade union.<sup>63</sup> The 2008 collective agreement is illustrative of this as employees gained significant wage increases while outsourcing was '*extended to areas including scanning, blue-collar work, research at the Registrar of Companies, the safekeeping of files and introduction of new technologies*' (Soumeli, 2008b).

Subcontracting and outsourcing essentially lead to structural or deep divisions within a workplace.

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<sup>60</sup> Case study 6. Interview with the Senior Director

<sup>61</sup> Collective Agreement for the banking industry 2005-2007

<sup>62</sup> Interview with ETYK trade unionist.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Employers' Association officer.

The distinction between direct and indirect workers, *vis-à-vis* the big employer/main firm is built on a different overall function in the labour process, articulated according to different organisational rationales and implying different terms and conditions of work. Although subcontracting or outsourcing in theory does not always imply *a priori* non-unionism or exclusion from relevant collective agreements, in practice and once it takes root in an industry it often does. The relatively small size of the enterprises which involve themselves in the working end of subcontracting networks renders organisational attempts by the trade unions difficult and often dissuades them from even attempting so in preference for larger enterprises. The uncertainty inscribed in subcontract work, as employment of workers depends on the subcontractors' ability to secure a contract or not, and the 'race to the bottom' that is often the case in the market competition, makes workers too vulnerable to even consider unionisation attempts, which in any case is often implicitly non tolerable by most subcontractors. On the other hand, the workers' feeling of injustice must in some way be dealt with, most importantly for avoiding potential labour unrest. So especially in cases where the majority of workers are Cypriots it is likely to have subcontractors abide by or almost abide, at least for their core workers, by the terms of existing sectoral collective agreements even if their workers are not unionised.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.4. Undeclared work

*There used to be a procedure concerning workers from the third world and we could ensure they had the same rights with the Cypriots, so as to protect both these people and the Cypriots from arbitrary competition, today there is no such thing. Now they come in thousands from Poland, from Bulgaria and they not only are not paid social insurance, but are paid lower wages in violation of the collective agreements, working time and all labour legislation.*

*(General secretary of builders' trade union, PEO)*

#### 3.4.1. Informal economy

The informal economy constitutes a significant segment of the global economy and is linked to the processes of global migration. As migration expands and border crossing becomes more difficult, many of those who manage to enter the state of their destination, or a state along the route of their original destination, do not manage to obtain work permits and have to work in the 'black' or

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<sup>64</sup> Case study 7.

‘underground’ economy. The main body though of this underground economy consists of workers who come with work permits which are not renewed once they expire. Having worked legally in a country for 4-5 years they can then utilise their experience and the gained knowledge of the prevailing social and economic conditions in order to attempt to survive in semi-legality. Around 30 000 non-Cypriots are estimated to be ‘without papers’ in the area controlled by the Republic of Cyprus, while the total number of the undeclared ones, that is including those that are entitled to work (from EU countries) but are working without paying social insurance is probably bigger<sup>65</sup>.

The existence of a migrant, legal, semi-legal and illegal ‘labour segment’ at the bottom of the social pyramid, doing the ‘dirty and low-paid work’ that Cypriot workers refuse has been more or less established since the 1990s and although occasionally criticised, it is more or less considered normal. The current left-wing government emphasises that there are no ‘illegal workers’ but ‘illegal employers’ but when one moves beyond the rhetoric, the function of the state apparatus and its implications remain more or less unchanged. Although arrests and prosecution of employers employing immigrants illegally increased to 745 in 2008 and 1208 in 2009 (Police of Cyprus, 2010), in the small closed society of Cyprus the prior unofficial warnings of governmental workplace inspections, allowing undeclared workers to disappear beforehand,<sup>66</sup> is unlikely to have stopped. In any case, governmental inspections are a very rare phenomenon in some areas and some sectors, such as for example the Paphos hospitality industry, as there are too few inspectors and too many workplaces.<sup>67</sup> This is, however, a broader issue that also affects other sectors and other areas.<sup>68</sup>

Often there is lack of communication and coordination between governmental departments. The Social Insurance authorities, for example, do not examine whether an unregistered worker is legal or illegal and whenever they find one they proceed to register him/her<sup>69</sup> for the purposes of Social Insurance. The authorities have difficulties in containing the phenomenon of undeclared work because the unregistered workers and their employers collude in avoidance tactics. In the construction industry, once an inspector shows up they run into the fields if they do not have a work permit and those that do not need one stay there and report that they have just started work, since

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<sup>65</sup> In Kathimerini (20/2/2011) it has been argued that around of 40% of EU workers are either working without being registered or illegally.

<sup>66</sup> Technician B, hotel 3

<sup>67</sup> SEK district hotels' trade union secretary, Paphos. According to official data (Yearly Report, 2007) in 2007 there were only 14 inspections of hotels and restaurants in Paphos district.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2008 about undeclared work, Social Insurance Services.

<sup>69</sup> Note, Concerning illegal employment and undeclared work, Social Insurance Services, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, 12/5/2008

according to the law they are obliged to register within one month from the day they start work.<sup>70</sup> More often there is obstruction of governmental inspectors, especially in construction sites. One foreman (case study 6) stated explicitly to me that sometimes inspectors are beaten up in some work-sites and this is confirmed by the minutes of a tripartite committee dealing specifically with the issue.<sup>71</sup> In June 2008, the Social Insurance Services conducted a campaign to eradicate undeclared work in the construction industry, examining 1109 employers employing 2953 workers out of which 4% of the employers and 27% of the employees were not registered.<sup>72</sup>

‘Black’ labour is not only found in small firms or at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Hjarno, 2003), as a significant part of it consists of second jobs by already ‘normally’ employed workers, in search of extra income, while the phenomenon is also prevalent among young employees and students. Although undeclared work is a complex phenomenon and exists in many varieties (Pfau – Effinger, 2009) it is primarily and essentially part-time and temporary in its nature. It is a common practice of many employers to hire temporary workers on a ‘provisional basis’ and to decide later on whether to register them or replace them. This is to avoid the cost in money/time terms. Undeclared work is also common among Turkish Cypriot workers in the south employed primarily in the construction industry and this has led the social partners, many years ago, to propose measures to the Labour Ministry in order to restrict the phenomenon of undeclared work and the resultant loss in social insurance money (Soumeli, 2004). However, although the state and the social partners, especially under the current government, are engaged in a battle against undeclared work, this phenomenon endures in Cyprus, like elsewhere, showing no signs of disappearance or even significant retreat. As the Minister of Labour herself admitted in her interview on 29/6/2010,<sup>73</sup> illegal and undeclared employment stands at around 24-25% in the hospitality and construction industries.

### 3.4.2. Super-exploitation

Undeclared work is undoubtedly the primary site where super-exploitation takes place. Super-exploitation occurs when work becomes something akin to slavery with the wages earned barely being enough for the subsistence of the workers who are often lacking the means to escape this

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<sup>70</sup> PEO general secretary of the builders' union.

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2008 about undeclared work, Social Insurance Services.

<sup>72</sup> Out of the self-employed 2% were caught unregistered. Minutes of the meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2008 about undeclared work, Social Insurance Services.

<sup>73</sup> (<http://www.sigmalive.com/inbusiness/news/management/281343>)

situation. Super-exploitation creates the ‘working poor’ who manage to survive in difficult conditions which can be characterised along a range from bad to appalling. The ‘black’ labour market is a very harsh environment and it often involves trafficking, bonded and unpaid labour and is sometimes associated also with organised crime and the organised underworld. The case of the Romanian workers revealed in the summer of 2009 who were living in makeshift slums and sent for unpaid work from one employer to another for casual work and being paid 20 euros per working week is probably the most striking one.<sup>74</sup> The fact that it happened to involve EU citizens probably helped in allowing it to become a public issue in Cyprus. Nevertheless, such situations of overt exploitation, especially with respect to non-EU workers who also have to face the threat of deportation<sup>75</sup> on an everyday basis, are much more frequent, even though they rarely reach the media spotlight.

Working in the ‘black’ market is probably the most precarious employment regime that exists. One is never certain that one will be paid at the end of the day and there is strictly speaking nothing that can be done about it. There are many situations where employers simply refuse to pay workers for work done – a Turkish Cypriot friend of mine in 2006 had exactly such an experience in a small sub-contractor in the south while in my fieldwork in case study 3 one Asian student worker narrated to me that his previous employer responded when he and his friends had asked for their wages by threatening them that he would call the police if they did not disappear from the premises.<sup>76</sup> Super-exploitation in terms of non-paid or under-paid work in the ‘white’ labour market segment of undeclared work, although equally unjust and brutal, is expected to be less frequent and more mild as in theory, and if one overcomes one's fear, it can be dealt with. When in my fieldwork case study 2, three young Polish women workers attempted to leave that employer and had asked for their wages, they were given a small token sum and were informed that that was what they were entitled to. However, the eventual intervention of a PEO trade unionist forced the employer to give them the rest of their wages.

Super-exploitation does not always assume such dramatic forms and most importantly is not an exception to the rule of say ‘simple exploitation’ or an aberration in the functioning of the market. It is a structural phenomenon and its incidence, although much more frequent among the immigrants

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<sup>74</sup> (<http://www.sigmalive.com/simerini/news/local/209008>). An analogous situation reached the media in 2011 as well again with Romanian workers (Politis, 5/2/2011)

<sup>75</sup> According to the Police Report of 2009, 3231 immigrants were deported in 2008 and 3673 in 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Many economic migrants come to Cyprus as students – registering in private colleges in order to get a residents' permit and working illegally in order to survive. In 2006, students from non-EU countries were given the right to work on a part-time basis.

in general and the immigrants without papers in particular, is not restricted to these social groups. It also involves some Cypriots – child labour, workers employed in and through family and village networks, students etc. A key factor in the super-exploitation nexus for the workers entrapped in it, is the fact that their employer is often also their landlord. This has two functions: the employer-landlord profits from rent as well as labour and through simple accounting acts, he is able to circumvent the minimum wage law and secure labour power very cheaply. Charging relatively high rents for usually poor and crowded accommodation allows the employer to nominally offer decent wages which however exist only on paper as the cash actually received by workers can be and usually is disappointingly low. From a political and practical perspective this dual function of an employer-landlord restricts and prevents, *de facto* for most and also *de jure* for non-EU, immigrants from either challenging or even simply deserting their employer.

### 3.5. Trade union response to the deregulation of employment relations

In the process of ending this chapter and before beginning the next one, it is appropriate to spell out again the response of the trade unions to the various forms of the deregulation of employment. It is not the case that trade unions accept without protest the deregulation process. They do insist that collective agreements should be respected, personal contracts avoided, subcontracting restricted and undeclared work abolished. Nevertheless trade unionists before everything else, are practical people. They realise what is within the orbit of their influence and what is not. It might be the case that they were late in understanding the threatening implications of the spread of personal contracts and subcontracting networks, which along with increased immigration led to the segmentation of the labour market and the exclusion of many workers from previously hard won rights and benefits. Trade union reaction in the 1990s was slow and unable to realise the seriousness of the transformations under way or in any case unable to contain them. The employers' offensive was successful in setting the field, marginalising and in certain cases excluding trade unionism and collective regulation. Hence trade unions have been forced to a defensive position – trying to protect as much as possible the core of the labour force who are still their members rather than trying to extend organisation to irregularly employed workers. The next chapter will examine the structure and politics of the trade unions in more detail in an attempt to analyse and explain the current state, role and potential of trade unionism in Cyprus.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: The decline and transformation of trade unionism**

Trade unionism as a phenomenon is at the heart of modern labour relations and inevitably at the centre of any discussion about the working class. As I have already mentioned in the introductory chapter, it takes different organisational and political forms in different countries, rooted as it is in different historical trajectories and institutional systems. Although a global phenomenon, based in theory on a common bundle of ideas of workers' representation in order to achieve workers' welfare through mobilisation and negotiation, and thus inviting and even to some extent necessitating international comparative analysis, the particularities at national level are quite significant. In fact they preclude the construction of a theoretical trade union 'norm', 'model practice' or 'ideal organisational form' that can serve as a basis according to which empirically examined, actually existing trade unionism in a country can be evaluated.

Trade unionism reached its peak in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century and began to decline in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as a result of many factors – which can be summed up schematically as the effects of globalisation (Paleologos, 2006; Standing, 2011): the weakening of unskilled and less-skilled workers' labour market position as a result of enhanced capital mobility that could not be countered with the also expanding mobility of labour (Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011); the growth of individualist and market-centred ideologies such as neo-liberalism; and the broader erosion not only of class-centred ideas but also of the welfarist social-democratic spirit amidst generalised depoliticisation and passive consumerism. The decline of trade unionism was accompanied with a process of transformation as a result of, and as an attempt to adapt to, the new realities on the ground (Howell, 2005). These international processes were neither simultaneous nor identical across different countries (Phelan eds., 2007).

This chapter attempts to embark upon an examination of the contemporary state of trade unionism in Cyprus based on the fieldwork data in order to offer an anatomy of the phenomenon and discuss some of its dimensions. The focus of the analysis lies on the organisational and political power of trade unionism which is discussed in terms of trade union structure and function and effectiveness in influencing labour conditions and promoting workers' interests. Weaknesses and difficulties in trade union performance are identified, described and explained with references to the broader historical,

social and political context. The notion of class struggle constitutes an implicit assumption used both as a political anchor and as an instrument of comparative analysis.

#### 4.1. General and industrial trade unionism

The distinction between general and industrial trade unionism is an important one because there are significant differences between the two, preventing the making of valid generalisations concerning trade unionism in Cyprus. General trade unionism concerns the majority of workers in Cyprus and is found in varying degrees in many sectors and occupations. However, there are also some specific sectors like teachers, bank employees and civil servants that have their own independent trade unions, organised on an industrial basis. This sub-chapter will compare and contrast industrial and general trade unionism using the examples of the banking sector, on the hand, and the construction and tourism sectors, on the other.

Because the terminology used might sound confusing a short bibliographical note is necessary in order to define the categories used. General trade unionism effectively refers to the three national trade union federations that are composed of many different unions each covering one or more sectors and organised on an industrial basis. The term general unionism is used here because of two reasons: a) the political and ideological split into three which dilutes the industrial unionism principle of '*one representation in each firm, one union in each sector*' (Paleologos, 2006 p. 68) and b) the more or less centralised structures of the three federations as they have developed historically in which the officials and the professional trade unionists belong really to the federation as a whole where decision-making power also rests and move from one industrial union to another with time and as part of their career. Industrial unionism on the other hand here refers to the independent trade unions of white collar employees who are primarily mental workers and professionals and which, although more akin to the craft unionism of the early capitalist era in terms of their autonomous organisational entrenchment and selfish guarding of the privileged stratum's interests (Paleologos, 2006, p.68), are not split on ideological and political lines and in this sense are truly industrial organisations. And since this chapter deals with trade union power, it is appropriate to state in advance, before entering into the empirical part and explaining the specifics of trade unionism in Cyprus, that today it is observed that trade unions are more effective in protecting the interests of workers who already enjoy some degree of labour

market power (Simms and Charlewood, 2010).

#### 4.1.1. Efficiency

The first difference between banking sector and construction and hospitality sector trade unionism is the enormous discrepancy in their density levels. In the banking sector the rate of unionisation is almost 100% whereas in the construction and hospitality sectors it is around 50% of those registered, significantly lower if one takes into account the unregistered ones. Moreover this 50% is divided more or less equally between SEK and PEO, while DEOK only has a marginal presence. This means in practice that the organisational power of the industrial trade union ETYK cannot be compared with the organisational power of the three general trade unions at sectoral level. On the other hand, it can be argued that the general unions are really much stronger at national level in the sense that they are stakeholders in the economy as a whole and influence policy-making with respect to labour through their participation in a multiplicity of tripartite bodies. At the sectoral and most importantly at the workplace levels, however, they are too weak to influence decision making, which rests exclusively in the hands of the employers. Industrial trade unions, on the other hand, might be unable to influence broader policy making but are much more important players at sectoral and workplace levels as they firmly control the supply of labour and are in a position to negotiate every single detail of the labour process with the employers. The hiring of temporary and seasonal bank employees, for example, is wholly regulated and controlled by ETYK.<sup>77</sup>

General and industrial trade unionism differ in their corresponding roles in the workplace. Whereas both the general and the industrial trade unions want to have a say in the regulation of work and in the shaping of labour relations, they have different rates of success. This is a reflection of their different organisational power as well as their different overall function. The banking sector operates under what might be called a unitarist system of industrial relations, where the trade union is seen and operates as an extension of the management bureaucracy (Burchill, 2008). The fact that ETYK has a say even on issues such as promotions is illustrative of that.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, ETYK, unlike the general trade unions, negotiates with the employers even between collective agreements and reaches mutually binding agreements in the meantime. An example here is the agreement on part-time work reached in April

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with ETYK trade unionist

<sup>78</sup> Interview with ETYK trade unionist

2007, one year before the expiry of the 2005 sectoral collective agreement.<sup>79</sup> General trade unions in the construction and hospitality industries, on the contrary, were unable to agree with the employers during 2007-2008 on the critical issues of subcontracting and the beginning of the tourist season respectively, in between the collective agreements.

Employers are well aware of the implications of the discrepancies in organisation and efficiency between different forms of trade unionism and utilise different strategies in their dealings with them. Whereas in the case of ETYK the strategy is generally speaking one of co-option, in the case of PEO and SEK the strategy is generally speaking one of marginalisation. To be sure there are exceptions in both cases but it is possible to discern these two different trends in employers' thinking and acting with respect to the industrial and general trade unions. Employers essentially adapt to the reality they face; an efficient trade union which effectively controls the labour supply and which can potentially organise a strike with total participation is better to be close to management and allowed to have its way most times rather than risk confrontation.

On the other hand, there are limits to what can be gained by the trade union in the context of a unitarist system and limits to the operation of the unitarist system itself. These limits are defined at the end of the day by the extent of employer toleration. The case of the National Bank of Greece in 2006-7, where there was a big industrial conflict leading to a short national strike, resulting in the creation of a small company trade union is illustrative of that<sup>80</sup>. There the National Bank management adopted an intransigent stance and attempted to force its will, despite ETYK's opposition, concerning the transfer of two middle managers from Greece to be employed outside the framework of the sectoral collective agreement. This can be seen as an exception, yet at the same time it also served as a test case for everybody – both ETYK and the employers flexed their muscles and reminded each other that collaboration has its limits. The creation of a second banking industry trade union in the aftermath of the conflict, for the moment restricted to the National Bank of Greece, is also interesting – a small company trade union is not significant in itself but it does consist of a precedent and an example potentially threatening for ETYK if it is emulated in other banks in the future.

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with ETYK trade unionist, also Soumeli (2007)

<sup>80</sup> The industrial conflict reached the final stage of the official dispute resolution procedure, that is that of public research (Trapezikos, 2008)

In the much less privileged sectors of construction and hospitality employer intransigence is a much more common phenomenon. And this is also a result of both the labour market weakness of workers as well as the organisational weaknesses of the trade unions. A semi-efficient trade union which cannot mobilise the total or even an overwhelming majority of workers in a sector is less of a threat for the employers and more easily ignored. This is not to say that employers do not seek collaboration with the general trade unions – they do. Nevertheless they can afford to be tougher with respect to the trade unions, ultimately based on the existence of a pool of un-organised and primarily immigrant labour who is much less likely to participate in a potential industrial conflict. This might explain the big delay in the renewal of the last hospitality sector collective agreement.

#### 4.1.2. Structure

Another important difference between industrial and general trade unionism concerns the structure of the trade union and the relationship between the trade unionists and the trade union members. ETYK has very few professional trade unionists. Most of its full-time trade unionists are bank employees, paid by their banks but who are temporarily posted to ETYK. This in itself shows both the strength of the trade union, which has achieved such an economically beneficial agreement with the employers, as well as its weakness evident in its ultimate dependence on the banks for the conduct of everyday trade union activity. ETYK is more or less an integrated part of the overall banking sector industrial relations system. General trade unions, on the other hand, are more independent from the employers but achieve this at the cost of also being relatively external to the industrial relations system. Although professional trade unionists from the general trade unions visit regularly the workplaces where there is a significant trade union membership and discuss with the workers, they are restricted primarily to an observational role, looking out for sectoral collective agreement violations in order to issue complaints to the employers and the state. The fact that violations of the sectoral collective agreements constitute in practice the norm,<sup>81</sup> especially concerning un-unionised workers, is illustrative of the limits of the power of general trade unionism.

What follows from the above is that industrial and general trade unionism also differ in the efficiency levels of their corresponding workplace committees. Both general and industrial trade unions have

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<sup>81</sup> This is acknowledged by most trade unionists interviewed.

workplace committees that discuss the issues as soon as they come up. In ETYK these meetings take place on a monthly basis<sup>82</sup> and they deal with minor and local issues that do not need to be forwarded to the district or national level. In the general trade unions, on the other hand, these committees do not have regular meetings and do not constitute a primary problem-solving mechanism. They are more involved in information gathering and recruiting members and do not have the willingness and capacity or even jurisdiction and authority to discuss issues with the employers.<sup>83</sup>

However, despite their differences, general and industrial trade unionism have one thing in common. They both focus on the middle-level workers and above and do not pay significant attention to the workers at the bottom of the employment hierarchy. This is illustrated through the composition of the workplace committees,<sup>84</sup> through the workplace chosen contacts and interactions of the professional trade unionists<sup>85</sup> and through the discourse and examples given by trade unionists when describing their activity.<sup>86</sup> This bias in the stance of the trade unions in favour of the better-off sections of the working class is neither new nor unique to Cyprus. The idea that a kind of labour aristocracy emerges within the capitalist labour process which is also dominant in the labour regulation institutions hindering the development of a revolutionary class consciousness is a familiar one in the Marxian and socialist literature.<sup>87</sup> It was developed in an attempt to offer a theoretical explanation for the political problem of the penetration of bourgeois and petty bourgeois mentalities and world-views within the labour movement, first by Engels' observations on the English working class and then by Lenin's (1915) critique of the Second International. The labour aristocracy theory, although not a systematic endeavor, essentially posits the schema of an ideological diversion of a reformist or an opportunist sort by the trade union bureaucracies and the better-off workers. The notion was coined for sections of the Western working class enjoying the material condition of improved living conditions as a result of imperialism, although it is not clear to what extent this is a structural condition and how this shift in class relations takes place.

What is interesting for the purposes of this study is the way through which this trade union bias in favour of the better-off workers is articulated and rationalised. I have elaborated in Chapter 3 how the

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<sup>82</sup> Bank employee, secretary of the Nicosia committee of ETYK

<sup>83</sup> Interviews with trade unionists from PEO and SEK (3<sup>rd</sup> case study, 6<sup>th</sup> case study)

<sup>84</sup> Case studies 3 and 5.

<sup>85</sup> Case study 2 and 4.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews with trade unionists in all seven case studies .

<sup>87</sup> For a review see Strauss, 2004 (<http://links.org.au/node/45#>)

trade unions usually exclude, or are simply unable to reach, irregular workers. On a closer look, however, even within the trade union membership there exist differentials in the levels of attention offered by the organisation to its members. From the trade union perspective it makes sense to focus on the middle-level workers and above as these can presumably persuade and carry over the lower-level workers when need arises, for example in a strike call. The opposite is more difficult to achieve as those at the bottom of the work hierarchy usually have less influence and the trade union leadership cannot rely on them. Also since labour turnover is also much higher among low-grade and less skilled workers it is much more difficult for trade unions to organise them and keep them in membership. From the workers' perspective, trade union indifference and discrimination causes disillusionment and movement from one trade union to another<sup>88</sup> or even withdrawal from trade unionism as a whole. From the management perspective the trade union focus on the better-off workers is functional in the reproduction and reinforcement of the already existing segmentations and discipline based on the workplace hierarchy.

#### 4.2. Organisational difficulties in general trade unionism

The following is part of an interview with a cleaner from case study 1.

*-Do you know about the sectoral collective agreement?*

*- When I came I was not interested. I found a job so that I would not sit in the house all day. You mean how much I should get?*

*- Yes, there is an agreement between employers and trade unions.*

*- No, I am not interested. They said to me you will get £1.85, you will work at these hours. That's it.*

*- In the recent past cleaners used to be paid a lot better.*

*- No, I am not interested in trade unionism.<sup>89</sup>*

This short dialogue illustrates the difficulty of the trade unions to organise the workers at the bottom of the labour hierarchy, especially when these come from abroad and are less inclined to engage in any action that might place them in an antagonistic relation with their employers. Many employers and

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<sup>88</sup> Case studies 2, 3, 6.

<sup>89</sup> Cleaner from Greece, case study 1

managers are strongly anti-union<sup>90</sup> and most of the non-Cypriot workers are afraid to join the trade unions.<sup>91</sup> They are left therefore unprotected, victims to the whims of their employers who often violate not only the collective agreement in wage matters but also working time directives and labour legislation in general.<sup>92</sup> The organisational difficulties in general trade unionism should not, however, be reduced to the negative stance of the employers. This is definitely a fact and a fundamental factor observed in case studies 1 and 7, as well as in the outsourced workers in case study 4 and the subcontract workers in case study 6. However, there are also other factors that pertain directly to the trade union organisation.

#### 4.2.1. Communication with and integration of immigrant workers

A basic problem is the communication difficulties between trade unionists and non-Cypriot workers. The language barrier constitutes a basic obstacle in the attempt of the trade unionists to approach non-Cypriot workers. There are exceptions, of course, and some attempt at communication via the English language, but this is not generally possible.<sup>93</sup> The fact that a significant section of the non-Cypriot workers speak neither Greek nor English renders them unable to comprehend fully the circumstances of Cypriot employment and society. According to SEK trade unionists, most migrant workers do not know what a trade union is and what it does as they usually come from countries (East European and Asian) that do not have strong traditions of trade unionism. They are usually young as well, without long working histories and significant employment experience.

In addition thus to the language barrier, a broader cultural barrier to the communication of the non-Cypriot workers and the trade unionists can be seen to exist. This is essentially a facet of the more general exclusion of immigrants from the processes of Cypriot society (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2011). Cyprus has only recently become a host country for immigration and multiculturalism is still a matter of debate in the Cypriot public sphere.<sup>94</sup> Immigrants do not generally mingle with the Cypriots and do not participate in the political and cultural processes of their host society. Many immigrants

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<sup>90</sup> Managers in all three hotel industry case studies.

<sup>91</sup> Interviews with trade unionists.

<sup>92</sup> General secretaries of PEO and SEK construction unions.

<sup>93</sup> Many trade unionists, however, know only basic English and are unable to have elaborate discussions with English-speaking immigrant workers in any case.

<sup>94</sup> The opposition of most political parties to the educational reform includes usually a questioning of the necessity of the re-orientation away from ethno-centrism and towards a truly multicultural education and future society.



live together in the old part of the towns and interact with Cypriots primarily during work. However, there is a degree of segregation also at work as immigrants and Cypriots tend to have different occupations and tasks even when they physically co-exist in the same workplace, coming together primarily in break time.<sup>95</sup> Even at break time, however, immigrants interact primarily amongst themselves rather than with the Cypriots.

Nevertheless, the above should not sound as an absolute view since what I am describing is a tendency observed during my fieldwork and nothing more. To be sure, there are of course some qualifications that need to be made. First, is the variation in the degree of integration of the immigrant workers in Cyprus. Pontians, for example, that belong to the first wave of immigrant workers in the 1990s have achieved relative integration in Cypriot society, much more than the Middle-eastern, Southeast Asian, African and Eastern European workers. The fact that most of them speak the Greek language and have Greek passports has been helpful in their conception by Greek-Cypriots as 'national kin'.<sup>96</sup> Most Pontians are or have been in the past trade union members, while some of them have managed to become minor supervisors<sup>97</sup> and even small employers through the processes of subcontracting.<sup>98</sup> Pontian workers in the south are comparable to the first waves of Turkish immigrant workers in the north,<sup>99</sup> in the sense that both are simultaneously relatively included in their host society yet looked down upon by the locals.

#### 4.2.2. The limited appeal of trade unionism amongst precarious workers

The difficulties faced by the trade unionists in their attempt to enlist immigrant workers is greater in sectors such as retail trade, which does not have a tradition of trade union organisation. Immigrant workers are more vulnerable to employer threats and this is the basic factor that prevents the development of trade unionism in retail trade, according to PEO's relevant trade union secretary. There

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<sup>95</sup> Case studies 6 and 7.

<sup>96</sup> 'Omogeneis' is the official phrase used, which stipulates that they are of the same (Greek) descent. It is interesting to consider that many of these Pontians have Turkish as their mother tongue.

<sup>97</sup> Case study 3.

<sup>98</sup> This applies primarily in the construction industry.

<sup>99</sup> This should be qualified as the first waves of Turkish immigrants that settled in the north in the late 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s are not as homogeneous a category as the Pontians that settled in the south in the late 1980s and during the 1990s. Some, for example constitute part of the TRNC elite, some others were given land and many were given TRNC citizenship. The centrality of the issue of the Turkish immigrant workers in the north, not only for labour relations but also for the on-going Cyprus conflict will be discussed in chapter 7.

is no sectoral collective agreement since the employers do not accept this,<sup>100</sup> but there are enterprise collective agreements in workplaces with a trade union presence. In the rest of the enterprises workers are relatively unprotected, having only minimum wage legislation, to the extent that it is respected and enforced, as their basic protective net. However, in some enterprises there is also the phenomenon of enterprise collective agreements negotiated in the absence of trade unions, primarily by the better-off workers. However, these arrangements usually offer fewer benefits to the workers and constitute an employer method to keep the trade unions out.<sup>101</sup>

However, the distinction between immigrant and Cypriot workers concerning the conditions of labour and the conditions of political organisation is not as clear cut as might sound from the above. In retail trade, for example, young Cypriots face similar conditions of exploitation and exclusion as non-Cypriots. They change employers frequently, they are paid at or slightly above the minimum wage, they are usually un-unionised and they have few if any work benefits. The fact that young Cypriots usually live with their parents and thus do not pay rent allows them to have a better standard of living, but this does not put them in a different socio-economic category. Hence, when referring to the bottom of the labour hierarchy, ethnicisation and gendering, which will be discussed in the next chapter, are not the only dimensions. There is another over-determining dimension which can be termed 'precarisation' and which concerns primarily younger people who are usually situated in a weaker position in the labour market.

This will be discussed in chapter 6; here I want only to introduce the concept of the precariat,<sup>102</sup> which

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with relevant PEO trade union secretary.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with relevant PEO trade union secretary. As mentioned in the previous chapter the employers' preference for an enterprise level collective agreement is expressed even in sectors where supposedly they are bound by a sectoral collective agreement.

<sup>102</sup> I have already referred to the notion of precarity in the introduction and to Standing's (2011) recent elaborate and global descriptive analysis that culminates in a rhetorical polemic that argues for the politics of utopia. The precariat as a concept was developed, diffused and popularised by the frassanito and euromayday networks in the period 2003-2007, which understood precarity as the real political condition imposed by neoliberalism and post Fordist labour flexibility leading to a 'new' socio-political and inherently revolutionary subject (Foti, 2004; Frasanito Network, 2005). Although the notions of 'immaterial labour' 'communicative creativity' and of 'value beyond measure' (Negri and Hardt, 2000 and 2004; Virno 2004) have been central in the theorisations of the basis and characteristics of this new force, others have been more sceptical and focusing on the gendered, oppressive and exploitative conditions of its creation (Federici, 2006). Fumagalli (2005) insists on the universal right to guaranteed basic income as a strategy to de-link wage from work and thus undermine waged labour. Tsianos and Papadopoulos (2006) (and Tsianos, Stephenson and Papadopoulos, 2008) turn to more theory in an attempt to account for the impossibility of representation and the undesirability of re-territorialising inclusion for the precariat in what they call 'embodied capitalism' while Neilson and Rossiter, (2008) attempt to open even further the scope by viewing precarity as a social norm rather than merely a historical development putting forward the notion of 'translation' as the appropriate organisational form of struggle capable of dealing with

should not be seen simply as a multinational and international one, but above all as a transnational concept. This is not only because it exists in many different countries and among many different communities within countries but it also crosses borders and boundaries both between and within structures of political and social communities and consequently categories of rights and conditions. Precarious life and labour consists not only of overt economic exploitation and institutional exclusion but also involves the loss of autonomy over one's life and the subjection to employer authoritarianism and the harshness of the labour market. The lived experience of precarious workers' weak position in the labour market and the inherent uncertainty of their employment regime renders them wary of legalistic and formalistic discourses of labour rights and the potentiality of benefits and not only reluctant to join but also suspicious of trade unions, which are seen more or less as part of the overall unjust system of labour relations.

Having said that, let us examine more closely the trade union difficulty in organising precarious workers through some case study data. Many young workers, both unionised and un-unionised, expressed to me their disappointment with the trade unions. *'Trade unions have no case. They only care about their subscription money... When there was the issue of the renewal of the collective agreement everybody was prepared to strike. Eventually they agreed with the bosses.'*<sup>103</sup> The feeling that trade unions have somehow sold out to the bosses was indeed an important dimension that came out of my fieldwork. Many workers see the trade unions as inadequate forms of representation and vehicles of struggle. *'Trade unions should have been here every day fighting for our rights. They don't.'*<sup>104</sup> This may take the form of a total depreciation of trade unionism. *'It is the same thing, belonging or not belonging to a trade union. Why should the trade union get the money?'*<sup>105</sup> The bias of the trade unions in favour of the better-off, usually skilled, workers is noticed by the precarious workers and constitutes a factor that maintains the distance between them and the trade unions. *'I am not attending the trade unions assembly. They are not, anyway, interested in what I have to say, nobody will listen to me. Trade unions want to use us. We will gain nothing. Trade unionists belong to a different class. The skilled workers will talk, eat and drink, and they will use us. If the others*

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contemporary multiplicity and instability. The uprisings in March 2006 in France and in December 2008 in Greece (as well as the 2011 ones in various Arab countries) raise new issues concerning the political articulation of this (implicitly or potentially is an open question) revolutionary class. This international political and theoretical question, however, lies strictly speaking beyond the scope of the current thesis.

<sup>103</sup> Cook, young, now working on a part-time basis, case study 3.

<sup>104</sup> Barman, young, trade union member, case study 3.

<sup>105</sup> Forming blocks worker, young, case study 6.

*[meaning unskilled workers, primarily immigrants] go, I will go too'.<sup>106</sup>*

Trade unions today are not as popular or as powerful as they used to be in the past.<sup>107</sup> *'In the past they spoke and the employers listened. They could not dare to not listen. Today the bosses do not care about what the trade unions say'.*<sup>108</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 3, the expansion of informal and atypical labour has had an impact on the trade union movement. It has segmented the labour force and has steadily eroded trade union power at the workplace level. The failure of the trade unions to organise the irregular workers or the difficulty of doing so for many reasons, including employers' but also core workers' self – centred resistance as well as peripheral workers' indifference, reinforces the division of the workers, increasing the distance between the included and the excluded. Trade unions are thus left to play the role of the guard of the older and core workers and look increasingly towards the state for the more general protection of overall working conditions through legislation and especially through inspection and regulation.

The individualisation of employment relations and the real and perceived decline of trade union power are effectively two sides of the same coin, inescapable facets of the neo-liberal/post-liberal dominant framework and condition. In this context the trade unions are unable to develop a strategy in order to respond to capital's offensive and restrict themselves to a defensive stance of total adherence to the 'national compromise' of the tripartite system. However the national compromise, once the official policy of the employers, is now no longer their priority. This compromise, codified in a period of trade union strength, is not wholly acceptable today when the trade unions are in a much weaker position. Some employers have as their tacit aim the neutralisation of trade union power and the reshaping of the trade union function in order to convert it into a supplementary managerial and disciplining one. *'Trade unions cannot be allowed to determine management strategy. Our philosophy is personalised service. If the trade unions accept this, fine, if not the trade unions have to leave'.*<sup>109</sup>

#### 4.3. From the function of class mobilisation to the function of personalised service

The conception of the trade unions as the initial and primary mechanisms of class mobilisation

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<sup>106</sup> Unskilled worker, young, case study 6.

<sup>107</sup> This opinion was voiced by many workers in case studies 2, 3, 6 and 7.

<sup>108</sup> Case study 2: maitre d'hotel

<sup>109</sup> Executive company manager, case study 3

constituted the theoretical and political orthodoxy of the socialist Left for more than one and a half centuries. However, a closer look at the historical development of trade union movements can reveal that this is only one dimension of trade union activity and often not the one which is dominant. Heery and Kelly (1994), in their study of British trade unions, identify three types of trade unionism in the post-war period, coinciding with three historical phases. This analysis, allowing for hybrid formations and partial adoption of each servicing model between the representatives and the represented, is useful in the broader conceptualisation of trade union political operation and social function. Heery and Kelly's concepts of 'professional', 'participative' and 'managerial' unionism may be approached not so much as historical paradigms but as ideal types co-existing in temporal terms. In other words they may be employed as analytic constructs in order to account for different forms of trade union behaviour, internal structural and organisational patterns and overall logics of political function across the historical and contemporary field of action.

As I have already mentioned earlier, trade unions operate under multiple logics and have simultaneously various different often antagonistic functions. Post World War European trade unions are representative and established organisations, they are vehicles of the institutionalisation and mediation of class conflict and last but not least they are mass organisations with bureaucratic structures and thus with a degree of autonomy between the administration and the membership (Paleologos, 2006 p. 75-77). The key empirical issue in question for the purposes of this study in Cyprus is the relation between trade unions and their membership and the prevalent perceptions and ideas about trade unionism. In most of the interviews taken in all case studies the workers' conception of trade unionism and its utility, its meaning and significance, its scope and operation were raised repeatedly in order to grasp as complete a picture as possible from both the workers' perspective – members and non-members – as well as from the perspective of the trade union functionaries.

#### 4.3.1. Distance between organisation and membership

An immediate and general observation made during the fieldwork was the dichotomy between the trade union as an organisation and the workers as trade union members. In most interviews the workers refer to 'the trade unions' and not our 'trade unions' attributing to the organisation an external status and existence. 'We are told by the trade unionists...', 'let us see what the trade union says...' 'the trade

union offers us...' were expressions used by many workers interviewed. This is indicative of the distance that exists between the representatives and the represented, which constitutes a significant parameter in the overall examination of the trade union function. Density levels are important as they show the nominal strength and organisational capacity of the trade unions. However, what density levels cannot show is the quality of the relationship between the trade unions and their membership, the links that exist between the leaders and the led, the levels of actual as opposed to nominal participation, the internal procedures of the organisation etc.

The distance between the general trade unions and their members looms so large partly because of the limited activity of the intermediate group, that is the workers' committees which are supposed to be the trade union branch operative at the workplace level. These committees exist wherever there is significant trade union membership and are expected to constitute the local leadership of the workers, transmitting the authority of the trade union leadership downwards and directing the demands of the membership upwards to the trade union leadership. *'For these committees, the right people have to be selected. Often however it is few who volunteer'*.<sup>110</sup> The limited activity of these workplace committees<sup>111</sup> means in practice that the professional trade unionists who visit the workplaces on a regular basis are the only real intermediaries between the trade union leadership and the trade union membership. However, these professional trade unionists are often in a rush, spending limited time in each workplace and talking with only a small minority of the unionised workers. Many un-unionised workers, especially non-Cypriots, do not even know what a trade unionist is and what is his role in the workplace.<sup>112</sup> During my interviews with un-unionised non-Cypriot workers I had difficulty in referring to trade unionism and the trade unionists in such a way as to make my informants understand what and whom I was talking about. The most easily comprehensible description, as I soon came to realise with a trial and error method, was 'the guy with the newspapers'. The image of the professional trade unionist as somebody bringing newspapers – in a language they could not understand – and being largely irrelevant in the workplace and indifferent to a substantial minority, if not the majority, of the workers is indeed a sorry state of affairs.

#### 4.3.2. Continuing relevance of trade unionism and the power of trade union leadership

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<sup>110</sup> Trade unionist in case study 3

<sup>111</sup> Case studies 1, 2 and 7 did not have one, case study 3 and 6 had one in name but it did not have a significant role.

<sup>112</sup> Case studies 2, 3 and 6.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the unionised, primarily Cypriot, workers the professional trade unionist is still relevant to the workplace in many ways. First of all he<sup>113</sup> is the person to whom work-related problems (concerning working time, remuneration, conflict with superiors etc) are mentioned. The professional trade unionist thus assumes the role of the advisor and the protector of the workers from employer arbitrariness.<sup>114</sup> The role of the negotiator for the renewal of the sectoral collective agreement as well as for particular issues that come up during the period covered by the agreement, allows the sectoral secretaries to concentrate significant decision-making power in their hands. True, there is usually a trade union assembly before the negotiations start, but this assembly has largely an informative character.<sup>115</sup> It is meant primarily to inform the trade union membership about the policy of the trade union leadership and get some feedback from the rank and file members in the limited discussion that follows the secretaries' speeches. From the general assembly of the two main trade unions, PEO and SEK, I attended during my fieldwork in the construction industry, the basic conclusion was that it was an exercise in mobilisation and an attempt at legitimisation rather than a deliberation and decision-making body. Strategy issues were absent from the speeches of the two secretaries, which were full of rhetorical attempts to sway the audience in favour of the trade union leadership, securing the membership's consent for its next steps, including the possibility of a national strike.

However, in the construction industry, like in the hospitality industry, the 'national strike' has more the function of a strategic threat rather than that of a political tactic. '*We have to be sure that we will win before we call a strike*'.<sup>116</sup> Since a victory can rarely be predicted in advance, the strike weapon is rarely utilised by the trade unions. It is indicative that in all of the negotiations for the renewal of the sectoral collective agreements that took place in the last 4 years in the three industries on which I focused during my fieldwork, strike action was said to be on the agenda, yet it did not eventually happen. Issues of class mobilisation and collective action will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6. Here I just want to point out the absence of big strikes and the role this absence plays in the shaping of

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<sup>113</sup> The masculine personal pronoun is used here intentionally alluding to the fact that the immense majority of professional trade unionists are men.

<sup>114</sup> Despite the criticism of the trade unions by many workers, most of them acknowledged their continued significance, as a minimum protection from the employer. 'If the trade unions did not exist, the employers would do whatever they wanted', according to workers from case study 2, 3 and 6.

<sup>115</sup> Trade union general assembly for the construction industry in Nicosia district, June 2008

<sup>116</sup> Trade unionist leaders in the hotel industry.

the identity and character of trade unionism. Since strikes constitute the ultimate collective experience, being capable of bringing together and uniting workers across departments, ethnicity, gender and age, their absence undoubtedly has an impact on the workers' consciousness and serves to maintain the segmentation that is imposed on the labour force by the employers. More generally, the absence of class action involving the active participation of the workers reinforces the individualisation tendencies that exist within the labour process.

#### 4.3.3. Individualism and collectivism

The tendency of the individualisation of labour relations has been sketched out in the previous chapter and related to irregular employment. Here I will focus on the individualisation tendency within regular employment concerning unionised workers. This is illustrated more vividly in the dominant conception of trade union activity as 'problem solving'. This phrase was used by almost all the trade unionists I interviewed and also by some workers when referring to what the trade unionists do. The trade unionists see and project themselves as correcting the wrongs of the workplace, intervening in the affairs of the enterprise on behalf of their membership. This usually takes the form of an individual request by a worker concerning his/her situation such as unpaid and unregistered hours, programming of shift work, discrimination, conflicts with the departmental manager etc. These complaints are made to the trade unionist, who then goes to the accounts office, the middle management and if need be to the management of the whole enterprise in order to solve them through discussion and compromise.

Although most of the problems arising in the workplace are collective, in the sense that they concern a number of employees, they usually come to the attention of the trade union via individual and individualised complaints. The trade unionists have an ambivalent stance towards collectivism. On the one hand, they need it for their own existence, which constitutes the essence of their mission and the rationale of their policy. In this discourse they, especially those coming from the Left, would usually condemn the 'atomisation of the working class', and would refer to 'workers' egoism' as a problem for the trade union movement. Yet at the same time trade unionists' action, that is accepting and often requesting as well as dealing with the individualised complaints, serves to reproduce both the mentality and the practice of individualism.



Effectively it can be said that trade unions operate simultaneously in multiple ways. They assume the mobilisation role immediately before the negotiation of the collective agreements (and after that if they fail to reach a compromise) and they attempt to promote a participative inclination amongst their membership. The rhetoric employed here is that of the ‘common struggle’ and the ‘justice of our cause’. During the negotiations and more generally during all their interactions with the employers, when dealing with both individual and collective complaints, the trade unionists assume the professional role and attempt to secure the consent of the trade union membership to their actions and thus legitimise their mediating role. The rhetoric employed here is that of the ‘rights and interests’ and the ‘specialist/expert who knows’. However, one should not underestimate the disciplining function of the trade unions, which is something that the employers and the managers emphasize. *‘When there is a discipline problem with a worker we also inform the trade union. We say to them, talk to your member, he will listen to you. We want to help the worker and so does the trade union’*.<sup>117</sup> Trade unions are, in other words, asked to assist in the smooth functioning of the labour process by ensuring the cooperation of their membership with the firm's management at both middle and top levels. This corresponds to the trade unionists' managerial role with the rhetoric of ‘fairness and responsibility’ and the ‘promotion of industrial and social peace’.<sup>118</sup>

Last but not least, as it constitutes the reason why many workers join the trade unions, is their welfare role. Cheap medical care and cheap holidays were mentioned by many workers as the most important benefits of trade union membership, something which signifies that the trade union welfare role is of comparable significance with its mobilisation role. The fact that the last victory of the trade unions since 2005 was the creation of the ‘welfare fund’ to which the employer contributes 1% and is administered by a mixed committee (employers' and trade unions' representatives). This fund is meant to act as a safety net for the workers when unexpected needs arise, some sort of extra social insurance. Trade unionists are very proud of this and consider it their most recent achievement.<sup>119</sup>

#### 4.4. The politics of social partnership

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<sup>117</sup> Manager, case study 3.

<sup>118</sup> In case study 3, there was an incident that is worth mentioning. Room cleaners asked their departmental manager to allow them to leave 2 hours earlier during the Easter period provided that they finished their work before. When the hotel's manager found out about it, he increased the room cleaners' workload on the rationale that if they could do this for a week, why not do it all the time. The SEK trade union district secretary who told me this story, explained that he could not take the side of the workers because the manager was right and that the workers had made a mistake.

<sup>119</sup> Interviews with trade unionists.

Having examined the structure and practice of trade unionism in the Cypriot labour process, I move now to an examination of the broader political context of trade union activity. The main aim here is to account for and explain in theoretical terms the rationale shaping trade union policy so as to grasp the meaning and social role of the trade union phenomenon as a whole. Trade union practice needs to be compared and contrasted with trade union rhetoric in order to identify and analyse the links as well as divergences between publicly articulated ideology and empirically observed action. The argument here is that the organisational and political weaknesses identified above, and most importantly the re-orientation tendency towards personalised service and a quasi managerial 'problem solving' role, can only be fully explained when the institutional and ideological framework of social partnership is taken into consideration with respect to both its stipulations and implications.

#### 4.4.1. Class compromise

The maintenance of social peace constitutes the main axis upon which the post-colonial industrial relations system has been structured. As mentioned in Chapter One, the colonial institutions were elaborated and diversified in the post-colonial era, while the country's post-1974-war reconstruction needs led to the reinforcement and consolidation of the class-compromise regime via the 1977 Industrial Relations Code. Maintaining industrial peace became a priority for the cohesion of the Greek Cypriot community and this was based on the agreed prohibition of labour militancy. Tripartism, as the political expression of this Fordist-Keynesian class compromise since the late 1940s, remains more or less, despite local and international pressures, the skeleton of the contemporary industrial relations system in Cyprus. The fact that there has never been extended or particularly intense strike activity, let alone a general strike, since is illustrative of this system's success. Strikes are not a usual phenomenon in Cyprus, unlike Greece for example, and when they do take place they very rarely extend from one firm to another or from one sector to another.

If the maintenance of 'social peace' is the central goal of the Cypriot political system, 'social partnership' is the primary means through which this is achieved. Both big general trade unions PEO and SEK view themselves and act like social partners with the government and the employers' associations for the benefit of the state and the national economy. The procedures of this collaboration

as well as their evolution after the entry into the EU have been described by Sparsis (1998, 2001) and Ioannou (2007) and there is no need to repeat or elaborate on them here. My focus is rather on the meaning of this collaboration and its political impact on the logic and structure of the trade union phenomenon. Social partnership means above all ‘responsible trade unionism’ for the benefit of the national economy. Thus the trade union movement must exercise self-restraint in its wage demands, linking them with current productivity levels and the overall performance of the sectoral and national economy.<sup>120</sup> The linking of wage demands to profit levels is at the heart of the current class compromise. However, social partnership is not primarily an economic arrangement but essentially a political one. It means some sort of participation of the trade union movement's leadership in the running of the country's industries, even if this is more formal than substantial, and an established consultative role in the formulation of socio-economic policy.<sup>121</sup>

Although the trade union movement as a whole acts within the framework of social partnership, there are variations in the conceptualisation of this role and its ideological rationalisation between PEO and SEK. Whereas SEK proudly proclaims its role as a ‘social partner’ as the means through which the standard of living of the working people can be uplifted through the expansion and progress of the national economy, supporting ideologically the compromise between the social classes, PEO feels somewhat uneasy about this. For PEO its role as a ‘social partner’ is a necessity given the objective social and geopolitical conditions. Since PEO remains in theory at least ideologically committed to socialism through class struggle, being a social partner in the existing capitalist socio-economic system can only be understood as a temporary role, a product of the *‘historical compromise which prioritises the national over the class question’*.<sup>122</sup>

The policy of the historical compromise is of course nothing new, nor unique to Cyprus. It has really little to do with the fact that Christofias is currently the president, leading an AKEL - DIKO government<sup>123</sup> and little to do with the fact of the on-going negotiations for the reunification of the country. Really this historical compromise was established in the late 1940s and re-affirmed in the early 1960s and late 1970s, as discussed in Chapter One. What is interesting today about the notion of

<sup>120</sup> Interviews with trade unionists from SEK, PEO and ETYK, the latter referring explicitly to the sectoral collective agreement in the banking industry, 2005.

<sup>121</sup> See for example the participation of the trade union movement's leadership in the formulation of the government's plan to reform the social insurance system.

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Pampis Kiritsis, General Secretary of PEO and AKEL MP.

<sup>123</sup> EDEK was also part of the government coalition until 2009.

the historical compromise is that there is less need to defend it, publicly at least, and rebuke accusations of class collaboration. In the 1970s and even in the 1980s trade union leaders felt a pressure coming from the left both within and without their organisational and political ranks and had to answer to radicals demanding a tougher stance in the class struggle.<sup>124</sup> In the more conservative climate of the 1990s continuing into the 2000s, it seems that there is less pressure for PEO to prove its communist credentials and possibly more damage to be expected in terms of its image and membership growth if it comes to be seen as too 'ideological' or 'too dogmatic'. Class struggle and communism, as far as PEO and AKEL are concerned, has today more a symbolic than a programmatic value, legitimising current policy through references to the glorious history and the nobleness of the ideal rather than being a political orientation or strategy.<sup>125</sup>

#### 4.4.2. Integration into the state

Both PEO and SEK are relatively well integrated into the political system. They are both large and established organisations, whose appearance not only preceded but also shaped the formation of the modern mass political parties. PEO and SEK constitute the mass basis of the two political poles of Left and Right and this has been their characteristic since the 1940s, while the emergence of centrist social democracy in the late 1960s was accompanied by the splitting of SEK and the formation of DEOK. In the late and post colonial era, especially after 1974, there is a political commitment to cooperation between the two main trade unions on labour issues so as to maintain a united front vis-à-vis the employers. On issues of socio-economic policy, however, they often diverge, supporting or opposing government policy according to the political coalition that happens to be in office.<sup>126</sup> Although both PEO and SEK affirm their autonomy from political parties – SEK more so than PEO since SEK's affiliation and allegiance is less direct and shared by two Right wing parties, DISI as well as DIKO – they take pride in their links with the political leadership and the civil service and present their integration into the state as a sign of their power, as a mechanism of influencing labour and social

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<sup>124</sup> See for example the articles by Ziartides and Lasettas in the second volume of the PEO Journal 'Labour' October 1972, where they argue within the class war discourse in defence of their pragmatism and moderation.

<sup>125</sup> To be sure there are people who take the idea of communism seriously both within and without the parliamentary Left. However, this tendency seems to be too weak to achieve a significant impact on party or union policy. Within AKEL this is more pronounced among the youth, especially those that study in Greece and come into contact with the Greek communist party, KKE.

<sup>126</sup> See Kattos (1999) for the government supporting stance of SEK when Clerides led a DISI-DIKO government. PEO's stance today, now that Christofias leads an AKEL-DIKO government, is similar, as every public statement by PEO includes a reference to support for the government.

policy and participating in the overall regulation of the labour process.<sup>127</sup>

The integration of trade unionism into the formal political system and the state form is not restricted only to the institutional level. Class compromise via the politics of social partnership is essentially a social-structural not simply a political-institutional issue. It is, in other words, a much deeper phenomenon with strong roots into the mass basis of the trade unions and not unrelated to the conciliatory role of the trade unions at the workplace level. Notions of ‘reformist’ or ‘sold out’ trade union leaderships are thus too simplistic and hide much more than they reveal. It is probably more useful to search for the roots of class collaboration and incorporation into the logic of the state in the establishment of nationalism in the form of ethnic communalism as a dominant ideology. Although there are variations and degrees of nationalism in the Greek Cypriot community, the nationalist discourse as a whole does constitute the general framework shaping political orthodoxy (Mavratsas, 1999) and this affects significantly not only trade union mechanisms but trade union membership as well. It is the hegemony of Greek Cypriot nationalism, direct as well as indirect, which serves as the ideological context in which social corporatism becomes not merely a possibility but also the politics of reality. It is not a coincidence, for example, that PEO waves the Cypriot (post 1964 and especially post 1974 being essentially and de facto a Greek Cypriot) flag, nor that it feels the need to engage itself directly in its public discourse in the anti-occupation struggle of our ‘Republic’ which is the ‘shield and the spear of our people’. SEK, on the other hand, waves the Greek flag along with the Cypriot flag and talks about the struggles of Cypriot Hellenism and EOKA so as to make clear where its historical and ideological roots and orientations lie.<sup>128</sup>

Greek Cypriot trade unionism is integrated in the (Greek Cypriot controlled) Cypriot state in three senses – through the participation of its leadership in the context of the tri-partite system into a series of

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<sup>127</sup> Trade unions participate in a consultative fashion in a series of regular as well as ad hoc tripartite bodies and committees dealing with various aspects of labour and social policy including the Council for the Improvement of Productivity and the processes about the reform of the social insurance system to give two examples.

<sup>128</sup> Having said that, I also want to clarify that both SEK and PEO as organisations are less nationalist than the political parties to which they are affiliated and of course PEO, as a communist and Cypriotist organisation, is in theory non-nationalist and more potentially inclusive of the Turkish Cypriots with whom it maintains relations. In the last decade, as a result of pressures from the small yet existing peace movement, PEO is also attempting to move beyond the formal contacts that the Greek Cypriot trade union movement has occasionally with the Turkish Cypriot trade union movement and be a more active agent in rapprochement and the peace movement. Nevertheless, the division in Cyprus is fairly deep and entrenched and the more or less statist frame of mind of both SEK and PEO precludes them from entertaining, let alone assuming, any serious initiatives for common bi-communal action, beyond ceremonial rhetoric that transcends the ethnic border or challenges the partitionist *status quo*.

state and quasi-state bodies; through its adherence and to a significant degree operation within state (nationalist) ideology; and though its pragmatic and moderate role and practice at workplace and sectoral levels respectively. The trade union movement is not only educating, preparing and providing candidates from its apparatus for the ranks of parliament and government; it is also sustaining and promoting values of social peace and cooperation and (bourgeois) political democracy and the welfare state and inculcating to its membership directly and indirectly primary loyalty to the ethnic community and the state rather than to the national and international class. It is in this sense that the 'problem solving' and 'avoiding disturbances and trouble' logic which prevails in the labour process must be read in order to fully grasp the meaning of trade unionism and the social partnership phenomenon. The weakness of workplace trade union committees and their inability to challenge the reformist policy orientation of the trade union apparatuses is both an instrument and an expression of the integrative and accommodating function of trade unions as organisational forms and the pacification of the labour movement in Cyprus.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Management and hierarchies at work

*‘- So you have two bosses.*

*-More. (Laughing.) I am new and every woman is like boss. They show me the job’.*<sup>129</sup>

In this chapter I intend to analyse the management of labour through an examination of the power relations at workplace level as observed in the seven case studies of this research project. The focus here is on the organisation of work and the division of labour at both the formal and the informal levels in order to illuminate the factors that determine and influence both the act of work as well as the workplace relations on which its management is built. The roles of gender, ethnicity and age, networks and skills are taken into consideration in an analysis of the hierarchies and the power differentials in the labour process and the social cleavages of the labour force.

The segmentation of the labour market, the differentiation in terms of occupational positions and associated income and status and more generally the fragmentation of the labour force are relatively popular as well as classic topics in the literature of labour sociology. The division of the labour market into primary and secondary segments is both a functional and a historical process (Tilly and Tilly, 1998; Gallie, White, Yuan Cheng and Tomlison, 1998). Differentiation and hierarchy according to skills and workplace role and segregation and inequalities on the basis of gender and ethnicity is essentially a fundamental characteristic of modern work life and workplace power relations (Tilly and Tilly, 1998; Bradley, 1999). Capitalism has been from its beginning both a system built on and reproducing hierarchies and one intertwined with patriarchy and racism (Walby, 1986, Anthias and Yuval Davies, 1991). The resultant multiple fragmentation of the labour force into various different, separate and sometimes even competing or at least non-cooperating groups, is essentially boosting employer power and the rule of capital. The division of the workers on a functional as well as a social basis was something that I observed immediately during my fieldwork. Here I will attempt, based on my fieldwork notes and interviews, to identify and account for the key dimensions of these divisions.

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<sup>129</sup> Cleaner from Bulgaria, case study 1

### 5.1. Human Resource Management and the management of work

Management is essentially the function of control in the labour process. Like trade unionists, managers act in a representative capacity, promoting and materialising the interests of the owners of capital. Managers effectively exercise the legal rights of the employers on a day-by-day basis (Burchill, 2008). The act of work management, however, is not always performed by the formal channel, that is the official hierarchy. Hierarchies in the first place are not in practice as simple, rigid or straight forward as they appear on organisation charts. The direction and the supervision of work, that is the essence of management, is often a complex process determined also by factors other than official rank and duty, such as age and experience, gender and ethnicity, character and skills. This became evident from the first case study where I realised through my observation and interviews that the authority of the young Food and Beverage Manager was in reality a matter of negotiation with his departmental managers (*maitre d' hotel*, *chef de cuisine* and head barman) who were older and more experienced than himself. Formally it was the Food and Beverage Manager who was supposed to take the decisions and inform his departmental managers about them, but there were times when decisions were taken by them and they simply informed him afterwards. Formally these departmental managers reported to the Food and Beverage Manager, in practice, however, he was often circumvented, with the departmental managers reporting directly to the hotel manager.<sup>130</sup>

In big firms with specialised HRM departments I expected to find more elaborate and more specialised management structures. However, although this was the case in the banking industry, especially in the private sector bank, in the hotel and construction industry there was a gap between formal and actual human resource management. In case studies 3 and 6 for example, the Human Resource Managers had little knowledge and say about what was going on in the workplace, keeping primarily to their office work and being restricted to an administrative role. In theory they had the ultimate say on the recruitment and the retention of the firm's staff. In practice though they were too busy with paperwork and they left considerable autonomy to the other departmental managers concerning the firm's staff.<sup>131</sup> Thus, in order to analyse the act of directing and the process of managing workers and work at workplace level, one has to examine the role and activity of middle managers who essentially constitute

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<sup>130</sup> This phenomenon is also encountered in small and medium size firms in the construction sector, where the formal authority of the civil engineer is sometimes circumvented by older and more experienced foremen and subcontractors who communicate directly with the contractor, usually an ex sub-contractor himself.

<sup>131</sup> Interviews with HRMs in case studies 3 and 6.



both the force as well as the instrument of control at work.

#### 5.1.1. The middle managers

Middle managers running the various departments of a firm have effectively a key role in the labour process. They are simultaneously workers and employer's agents. Their work is essentially to co-ordinate work and ensure that their staff works at the required pace. They mediate between the firm's managers and the workforce, transmitting directions and rules downwards and complaints and demands upwards. This dual role they have, representing both the workers and the employers, is inherently unstable and often untenable, especially in times of labour unrest and class conflict. This was observed in most case studies, but was more clear in the hotel and the construction industries, specifically in case studies 2 and 6 where my fieldwork was conducted at a time of industrial unrest.<sup>132</sup> The stance of the middle managers is crucial in such times and may determine, or at least influence, the development and the potential success or failure of a strike. This is generally well known to both the management and the trade unions.<sup>133</sup> The management expects the middle managers and their assistants to be loyal to the employer and implement his policy. The management depends on the middle managers in order to rule the firm and must be able and willing to trust them 100%. In the case of a prolonged strike in a hotel in Paphos, the management had fired the *maitre d' hotel* because he did not consent to the recruitment of strike breakers.<sup>134</sup> Often it is a condition by the management upon the appointment of a middle manager that he will refrain from strike activity.<sup>135</sup> This usually takes the form of an oral agreement or a tacit understanding.<sup>136</sup> Just as senior managers expect their middle manager assistants to refrain from strike activity, so do middle managers with respect to their assistants. Relations between middle managers siding with the employer and their assistants siding with the staff and the trade unions in crisis times may be seriously damaged.<sup>137</sup>

The power to manage is ultimately a resource that in practice is the outcome of competition at multiple

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<sup>132</sup> Case study 2 was conducted in July 2007 when the trade unions confronted the tourism firm on the issue of the season's length and had threatened a strike. Case study 6 was conducted in May 2008 when the trade unions confronted the employers' association in the construction industry on the issue of subcontracting and the renewal of the sectoral collective agreement and had also threatened a strike.

<sup>133</sup> Interviews with trade unionists and manager in the context of case study 3.

<sup>134</sup> Case study 3, interview with the hotel's carpenter, referring to another different hotel.

<sup>135</sup> Case study 2, interview with *maitre d' hotel*.

<sup>136</sup> Case study 6, discussion with the foreman.

<sup>137</sup> Case study 3, interviews with executive housekeeper and restaurants assistant.

levels and in multiple ways. Competition within a firm may be inter-departmental or intra-departmental, horizontal as well as vertical. This was observed in most of the case studies. In the third case study, for example, the managers of the restaurants and the bars departments were in a continuous struggle to demarcate their ‘territories’ and separate their responsibilities. Inter-departmental competition was promoted by the management of the hotel as a method of incitement of the workforce to work better and to work more.<sup>138</sup> In the banking sector this intra-firm competition was promoted at branch level.<sup>139</sup> In the construction industry inter-departmental competition was often also inter-firm competition as subcontracting provided an economic weight and rationale to the general division of labour within the workplace. In case study 6, for example, this competition among the cooperating firms was expressed in terms of the allocation of time and the machinery such as the use of the crane.<sup>140</sup> Competition between individual workers within or across departments is also a fundamental phenomenon observed in all case studies. This competition has an important material rationale and implications for workers as well,<sup>141</sup> and whether formal, like in the tourism and banking industries, or informal, like in the construction industry, it is not merely beneficial and functional to management. Nevertheless competition among workers is also a condition for the disciplining of the workforce and thus making its management possible.

### 5.1.2. Authority and control

Management is essentially about asserting the employer's authority and control in the labour process. Managers at both high and middle levels enforce their power through processes of hiring and firing workers, supervising and evaluating them, determining who will be retained and who will be promoted in the firm. In some large corporations, as in case studies 2 and 4, most decisions are taken centrally, based though on the reports made by the local managers. In case studies 3 and 6 however, which are also large corporations, it is clearly the local managers that have the decisive role.<sup>142</sup> Departmental and middle or local managers control the entry and exit from the labour force according to the needs of the

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<sup>138</sup> Case study 3, interviews with hotel manager and bars manager.

<sup>139</sup> Case study 4, interviews with branch managers

<sup>140</sup> Case study 6, interviews with foreman and iron workers’ supervisor.

<sup>141</sup> This is the struggle for maintaining the job and for gaining promotions which will include pecuniary and non-pecuniary benefits. In case study 1, there used to be an ‘employee of the year’ scheme while in case study 4 there was a plan to introduce it. In all the case studies, there were evaluation procedures of the employees by their supervisors which determined the employees’ prospects for advancement.

<sup>142</sup> Local managers in case studies 3 and 6 were the only ones who knew the workers and were in a position to make decisions about them.

enterprise. In industries with high seasonality like the hospitality industry, the adjustment of the size of the workforce to the amount of the necessary work is vital for the proper functioning of the firm. Hence departmental managers must plan ahead based on estimates of the tourist arrivals in order to hire and fire their workers accordingly and assign to them full-time or part-time status or offer over-time work in order to catch up with the workload.

The goal of numerical flexibility, much more pronounced in the hotel industry, is achieved in practice by compiling lists of employable persons and calling them for weekend or summer work, as replacements or reinforcements of the existing staff.<sup>143</sup> The distinction between the permanent and the temporary staff is still present. However, as mentioned in chapter 3, the extension of the institution of personal contracts erodes this through the promotion of the six-month contract whose renewal is not automatic and does not offer the worker the benefits of permanent employment. One segment of the labour force in case studies 1 and 3 were neither permanent nor temporary. Many employees work under this regime of 'permanent temporariness' not knowing if their contract will be renewed and when and learning to be ready to face occasional unemployment.<sup>144</sup> This is not restricted to the hospitality industry because of the seasonality factor but also affects all industries that have high fluctuations in their product and thus also labour markets. The construction industry is also a relatively volatile sector with the market having its ups and downs and a section of the workers always ready to be pushed to unemployment.<sup>145</sup>

Management's control of the labour force primarily takes the form of assigning specific work tasks to specific persons. Departmental managers construct the work programme which stipulates who does what, when and where. This may take a daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly form according to the needs of the firm and the type of the work required as well as the available information and managerial plans. Once work is assigned, the managers and their assistants supervise its performance through periodic observation and direction. Often their mere presence next to the workers is enough to ensure that work will be done properly.<sup>146</sup> Occasionally though, managers comment on their workers' work, pointing out omissions and reprimanding them if and when they consider it necessary. Workers'

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<sup>143</sup> Case study 1, interview with bars manager.

<sup>144</sup> The implications of this precarious situation will be analysed in the next chapter.

<sup>145</sup> The construction industry was the sector most negatively affected by the global economic crisis with the consequences appearing in 2009-2010 in the form of a significant increase in unemployment.

<sup>146</sup> Note that this is also true for the trade unionists whose mere presence in the workplace is considered to be a significant part of their job.

behaviour with respect to each other, the management and the customers is also significant and also usually monitored and evaluated continuously, to a certain extent determining the workers' prospects for retaining their jobs and advancing in the labour hierarchy.

Employment security in the private sector for the majority of workers remains a dream as they have to prove on a daily basis their best qualities and not antagonise their superiors. *'You know how easy it is to give three warnings? Very easy'*.<sup>147</sup> There are of course different levels of employment security depending on the industry and the position of the worker in the firm. For some workers who have considerable power due to their skills or experience it might not be so easy to give three warnings after all; for others, especially if they are non-Cypriot, even warnings are considered a luxury.

## 5.2. Gender and ethnicity in the labour process

Gender and ethnicity constitute important factors in the labour process in Cyprus, influencing both the division of labour and the hierarchies of the workplace. Gender and ethnicity produce additional segmentations in the workforce resulting in the over-representation of women and non-Greek Cypriots in specific sectors and occupations. This often leads to the feminisation and ethnicisation of some occupations, reinforcing the existing segmentations within the labour force. Women and non-Greek Cypriots are under-represented in middle and higher ranking positions and in the trade unions and are, correspondingly, generally speaking paid less and over-represented in the low waged (Ioakimoglou and Soumeli, 2008). The pay gap between men and women constitutes a problem according to both the state (Labour Relations Department, 2007) and the trade unions but the diachronic efforts to overcome it are not particularly successful as the problem continues to persist (Soumeli, 2009a). As far as non-Cypriots are concerned, as mentioned in chapter 4, the degree of their integration in the Cypriot labour process and more broadly in the Cypriot society varies according to their country of origin and their stay time in Cyprus.

### 5.2.1. Gendering and ethnicisation of jobs

Despite all the legislation, technocratic policy suggestions and public rhetoric about (the need of)

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<sup>147</sup> Case study 3, interview with hotel manager.

gender equality, there are still exclusively masculine and exclusively feminine jobs and primarily masculine and primarily feminine jobs coexisting with gender neutral jobs in all the industries of the Cypriot economy<sup>148</sup>. This is a result of the maintenance and reproduction of patriarchal structures of thought and action and gendered conceptions of the social reality. Notions of the ‘proper’ or ‘suitable’ occupations for men and women are taken more or less for granted and are thus sustained and reproduced from generation to generation. This is not to say that patriarchy is the same today as it used to be one or half a century ago but one of its basic axioms, that is the segregation of the genders in terms of the social and economic roles, in this case at work, survives to a certain extent with little challenge.

The gendering of specific occupations in most industries is a ‘taken for granted’ phenomenon. My informants were puzzled, probably thinking that there was something wrong with me, when I asked them why there are no men cleaners or secretaries and why there are no women builders or technicians. These questions seemed kind of strange or even childish. Employers, managers and trade unionists responded by pointing out the lack of women applicants for such ‘men's jobs’ and *vice versa* and when asked why they thought this was so they resorted to various social stereotypes about the abilities and qualities of the genders. ‘*Men do not clean well.*’<sup>149</sup> ‘*Customers do not like to have men cleaning their rooms.*’<sup>150</sup> ‘*Women cannot endure the physical burden required in construction.*’<sup>151</sup> The explanations given for the segregation of the genders at work were not restricted to biological attributes but also included social and sexual explanations. ‘*Women have to take care of their family and do not have time or ambition for careers.*’<sup>152</sup> ‘*If women were employed in construction they would sexually distract the men workers who would be staring at their legs and breasts.*’<sup>153</sup>

The segregation of the genders at work is only the first step in the gendering process. Once it is established that a specific occupation or work position belongs to men or women, then the next step is to attribute male or female characteristics to the job itself. ‘*Get a lady to clean here.*’<sup>154</sup> ‘*When there is a technical problem in a room I call Mr X [head of maintenance department] to send me one of his men*

<sup>148</sup> Phileleftheros 7/3/2010 and 14/3/2010.

<sup>149</sup> Case study 2, Housekeeper.

<sup>150</sup> Case study 3, Housekeeper.

<sup>151</sup> Case study 6, Foreman. The same explanation was used by trade unionists.

<sup>152</sup> This argument was used by both men and women workers in case studies 3, 4 and 5.

<sup>153</sup> Case study 7, Foreman. The sexual distraction argument was used by some men workers as well.

<sup>154</sup> Case study 1, Food and Beverage Manager.

*upstairs to fix it*'.<sup>155</sup> Or *'I have no problem with my girls. They are conscientious and hard-working'*.<sup>156</sup> Since it is women who do and have always done the cleaning, it becomes customary to refer to the hotels' or the banks' cleaners as *'the women'*.<sup>157</sup> *'It was the women that started the 1999 strike. They were the stronger card of the trade unions'*.<sup>158</sup> The division into masculine and feminine jobs is also rationalised and internalised by the women themselves. Many women, for example, referred to biological factors to explain the division into masculine and feminine jobs. At the same time they said that full equality between the genders has not been achieved although significant progress has been made. Some considered masculine jobs more challenging but complained that men think of feminine jobs as pointless and boring.<sup>159</sup>

Ethnicity also constitutes a factor of segregation in the Cypriot labour process. There are the jobs for the Cypriots and the jobs for the foreigners. There are almost no non-Greek Cypriots employed in the banking industry<sup>160</sup> and there are extremely few Greek Cypriots in certain construction and hospitality occupations. These latter occupations are usually unpleasant and unattractive for the Greek Cypriots. They are too harsh, too boring and too badly paid, demanding usually little or no skills but a good deal of stamina and patience. Iron work, kitchen cleaning, forming blocks work, and unskilled manual work in general is the realm of the non-Greek Cypriot workers.<sup>161</sup> Segregation according to ethnicity is also present in mixed occupations such as restaurant and bar work. Greek Cypriots in these occupations are usually in charge, being above the non-Cypriots in the work hierarchy and often assisting the middle managers in the supervision.<sup>162</sup> The ethnicisation of certain occupations is similar to the gendering processes referred to above. Romanian iron workers in case study 6 were called *'Romanian'*, not iron workers, even when the reference had to do purely with iron work.

This over-determination of ethnicity serves as a mask of the real economic and functional differences. Among Cypriot workers and trade unions the idea that Cypriots are more skilled than non-Cypriots prevails. What is essentially a difference in function that effectively originates from difference in the labour price becomes fortified by ethnicised conceptions of skill. The implications of this, that is the

<sup>155</sup> Case study 3, Housekeeper.

<sup>156</sup> Case study 2, Housekeeper.

<sup>157</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3, 4 interviews with housekeepers.

<sup>158</sup> Case study 1, Head barman

<sup>159</sup> Case study 6, secretary and sales person.

<sup>160</sup> Case studies 4, 5.

<sup>161</sup> Case studies, 1, 2, 3, 6, 7.

<sup>162</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3.

severing of communication between the segments of the labour force and the inability for concerted class action, has already been mentioned in the previous and will be further discussed in the next chapter. The point here is the limited integration of the Cypriot and non-Cypriot workers despite their spatial and temporal sharing of most workplaces. It is essentially the segmentations of the labour market defining the work field and segmenting the labour process as a whole.

### 5.2.2. Discrimination and its challenge

However, when seen in a comparative historical framework, it can be said that inter-ethnic relations as well as inter-gender relations have improved. There is less discrimination on the basis of gender and ethnicity today than there used to be two or three decades ago according to both trade unionists and unionised Greek-Cypriot workers. The discourses of gender equality and anti-racism are today rhetorically at least socially hegemonic and formally constitute state policy. The full entry of Cypriot women into the labour market in the 1980s and the substantial increase of immigrant labour in the 1990s has essentially pressurised the Cypriot state and society to come to terms with the new reality under formation. The entry into the EU served as a catalyst in this process in two ways: a) forcing the Cypriot state to adopt a series of legal and political directives concerning equality, diversity and anti-discrimination and b) allowing the free movement of European labour into Cyprus enjoying in theory the same employment regime as Cypriot labour. Thus, on the one hand, it extended the legal and political framework at the level of the state preventing discrimination and, on the other hand, it brought a substantial number of European workers into the Cypriot labour market, rendering the goal of non-discrimination a real project at the level of society as well (Trimikliniotis and Demetriou, 2011).

In the past, when foreign workers were a small minority they were seen in a negative way by the locals. They were effectively the exception in the labour market and in the workplace and were easily and unashamedly marginalised by the trade unions and most Cypriot workers. As the number of immigrant workers in Cyprus kept expanding, however, in some workplaces and some industries even constituting the majority today, marginalising the non-locals made less sense and was in any case much more difficult. *'You have to learn to work with foreigners, that is going to be the new way'*.<sup>163</sup> Trade unions and most Cypriots gradually came to realise this *de facto* condition. In the changed social

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<sup>163</sup> Case study 2, new hotel owner, according to housekeeper.

circumstances of the 2010s the Cypriots have learnt to co-exist with immigrants, European and non-European alike, and although xenophobia is present and quite diffused, incidents of racial conflict are generally speaking rare. Despite the emergence and ascendancy of extreme nationalist-racist and neo-fascist groups in the last few years shouting ‘foreigners out’ (in their mind foreigners include Turkish Cypriots as well), they have not yet been successful in stirring any extended racial conflicts, whether at work or outside work.

Nevertheless, the integration of non-Cypriots in the Cypriot society in general and at the workplace in particular remains limited, as I have already mentioned before. Language remains a difficult barrier both to socialisation and to class unity. However, some workers are able to overcome communication problems by using signs and a minimal common vocabulary – mixing Greek, English and some words they learn from the foreigners, Romanian for example, in case study 6. The repetition of the same or similar tasks on an everyday basis allows workers to develop non-linguistic forms of communication as well, such as gestures and signs. The common experience and the everyday reality of working together undermines prejudice and social stereotypes, yet xenophobia and a sense of looking down upon non-Greek Cypriots remains strong in Cyprus and does constitute a large potential pool for more openly racist stances and actions.

As far as promotions and upward mobility is concerned, discrimination on the basis of gender and ethnicity is not only present but also acknowledged as being present by most workers. Women and non-Greek Cypriots are under-represented in highly paying and management positions. This is widely known. *‘There is discrimination. They don't give money to women. They say, she has a man so they do not promote her... I started work here at the same time with some men colleagues. They have become chef de partie, I have remained a cook B’.*<sup>164</sup> Beyond the classic explanation of male bread winning ideology and the lack of interest of women in careers there is also a reflexive stance trying to put the women themselves in the equation. *‘We, older women are more submissive. The younger women are more demanding. Of course there is discrimination. Why are there not women sous chefs?’*<sup>165</sup> In the Cooperative Central Bank one middle aged woman employee explained the ‘war’ she and her colleagues waged in the past for their rights, provoking the intervention of the trade union. Things have improved in the last decade, she admitted *‘but not to the extent we want. Patriarchy is still here and the*

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<sup>164</sup> Case study 3, woman cook B.

<sup>165</sup> Case study 3, woman cook A.



*struggle must continue. It is up to us the women, to a certain extent. We must not tolerate the establishment and must seek with our qualifications and our argumentations to rectify the injustice we suffer'.<sup>166</sup>*

Gender and ethnicity, however, are not only factors of discrimination and division in the workplace. They are simultaneously factors allowing and facilitating the creation of work collectivities based on common experiences and common work life circumstances. Gender and ethnicity are in other words not only used as means of segmenting the labour force in the interests of exploitation and oppression but also as resources of uniting individual workers, promoting notions of collective identity and commonality of interests based on the real commonality of working conditions and the idea of a shared fate. Women workers who are working together in say the housekeeping or the restaurants department of a hotel sometimes find their gender identity to be a significant element both in their communication and interaction at work and in their construction of social relations of solidarity and coping strategies. Similarly immigrant workers who are working together for, say, the iron work subcontractor and the forming blocks subcontractor in a construction site might utilise their common ethnicity or their common non ethnicity, their exclusion from Cypriot-ness, as an attribute that brings them together and links their work lives and experience.

### 5.3. Social cleavages in the labour force

The labour force in Cyprus, like in any country, is ultimately divided into sectors, firms and occupations. These organisational divisions of the labour process constitute the basis upon which other subsequent social divisions of the waged class are built. In order therefore to analyse the social composition of the labour force one must inevitably examine the social identities within the waged class and analyse the processes of their production and reproduction as well as their relative power and influence in determining social stances and political attitudes. Most importantly one must examine the elaboration, differentiation and development of these primary divisions as they expand in scope and increase in complexity through the processes of informality, subcontracting and networking in general.

#### 5.3.1. Occupational and sectoral identities

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<sup>166</sup> Case study 5, middle aged woman, departmental manager A.

Occupational identities are strong when they involve technical know-how, experience or other skills, be it organisational or social. Qualifications, be it degrees, diplomas or references, essentially fortify individuals in the labour market and determine employment chances, promotion opportunities and remuneration magnitudes. It is therefore logical that occupational identities become stronger when they have labour market weight or power and can be thus considered as being important by the employees themselves. This is directly associated with age, work position and experience. Builders, electricians and plumbers, for example, have strong occupational identities as they can carry along their skills from employer to employer. For many of them it is always possible to start their own business and become self-employed or even employers through subcontracting.<sup>167</sup> They are essentially much more occupationally secure than waiters, cooks or cleaners, who have less skilled occupations and thus less power in the labour market. Similarly in the banks, bankers or IT staff are more occupationally conscious than tellers or clerks.<sup>168</sup>

Sectoral identities are also important because they usually shape the labour market and determine the worker's employment field. In small towns like Larnaca, Paphos and Paralimni, for example, the tourist industry in general and the hotel industry in particular is the basic place to look for jobs. Once working in the industry, one comes to conceptualise oneself as a worker of that industry who may change position and most frequently employer but always accumulating the experience of having worked in the particular sector. This is most true for middle managers and their assistants who accept and operate within the managerial and employer notion of '*the benefit of the industry*' and by extension '*the benefit of the national economy*'.<sup>169</sup> Interestingly this is the position of the trade unionists as well, who insist that they serve the interests not only of the workers but also of the '*tourist industry*' and the '*Cypriot economy*'. Housekeepers and specialised barmen, waiters and cooks explained to me '*what the tourist wants*' and how the hotel '*should normally operate*' while managers had ideas about how the industry should be run and what should the government do to help the sector. Sectoral consciousness can be identified in suggestions for the creation of a separate industrial trade union,<sup>170</sup> in knowledge and

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<sup>167</sup> Case study 7.

<sup>168</sup> Case studies 4, 5. The specialisation and the careerist orientations of the former contrasts with the simply doing the job and getting by orientation of the latter. This is of course a schematic generalisation of an indicative and not an absolute sort.

<sup>169</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3.

<sup>170</sup> Case study 3, assistant housekeeper.

comparative descriptions on the local state of affairs within the industry,<sup>171</sup> and in comparing their sector with other Cypriot sectors or the same sector abroad.<sup>172</sup>

Bank employees have essentially the stronger sectoral identity. Their strong industrial trade union is ultimately a contributing factor both directly through the series of sectoral benefits it secures for its members and indirectly through the organisation of training, social events and out of work activities. Sectoral consciousness is strengthened by the social function of the banking industry, attaching notions of responsibility and attributing social status to bank employees. *'It is us who keep the people's money. Therefore we should both be and seem to be serious people both at work and outside work. We explain this to our employees, that their appearance and behaviour outside work affects the image of the firm'*.<sup>173</sup> Professionals in the tourist industry, especially those in five star hotels, similarly perceive their jobs as having particular significance as tourism is a strategic and vital industry for Cypriot society and economy. It is here where sectoral and occupational consciousness come together as professionals emphasize the standards that should be maintained as well as their responsibility as hospitality industry workers.<sup>174</sup>

### 5.3.2. Age and seniority

Age is ultimately another important factor in group formation at work. Age influences experience and often determines work position and thus remuneration rates, and its analysis is indispensable in the attempt to discuss the social composition of the labour force. As the usual complementary characteristic and often the key determinant of seniority, age constitutes an important parameter in the construction of formal and informal hierarchies at workplace level and is thus implicated in issues of authority and control. As a significant factor in the processes of social identification and differentiation, age may influence collective behaviour and shape collective action. There can be little doubt that it does have an impact on the social relations in the workplace.

The hospitality industry, for example, as a sector characterised by a concentration of young workers, is

<sup>171</sup> Case study 1, chef, case study 2, head barman, case study 3, chef de partie. This was also the case in the banking and construction industries, that is case studies 4, 5, 6 and 7.

<sup>172</sup> This was usually done by middle managers and their assistants, especially by those who had experience in other sectors in Cyprus or abroad.

<sup>173</sup> Case study 4, Human resource manager.

<sup>174</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3. Interviews with departmental managers.

a site of extended social interaction both inside and outside the workplace amongst colleagues across departments and ethnic groups. *'We get along well with the foreigners from the restaurants department. We joke, we have fun, we go out together'*.<sup>175</sup> Good relations between colleagues is also something that constitutes a target shared both by the managements and by the trade unions. This is often promoted formally through such activities as work parties and sports organised by the management or the trade unions<sup>176</sup> or informally through out of work social gatherings and watching football games together.<sup>177</sup> Being in a similar age range can be useful if not necessary for colleagues to relate to one another in a substantial as opposed to a merely formal way. Age often serves as a precondition for more complete social exchanges that may also extend beyond the workplace.

Workers of the same age are also usually expected to have more comparable life experiences and more similar ways of conceptualising their world. Since age is also linked to years of participation in the labour market if not also in the specific firm, it may serve as an axis in the process of group formation and/or constitute a factor of differentiation and division of the labour force.<sup>178</sup> Older workers, for example, who have lived times of bigger trade union strength or who have memories of past struggles might have a different opinion on and stance *vis-à-vis* the trade unions. Younger workers, on the other hand, who were born and grew up in times of depoliticisation and individualist consumerism are less likely to respond to calls for collective organisation and class struggle. Some younger workers may even prefer flexible and individualised work arrangements. Yet, on the other hand, an industrial conflict involving younger workers is probably bound to be more intense and less orderly as respect for social conventions and extra-workplace familial and communal pressures for restraint tends to be weaker.

Seniority generally has a significant impact on workplace hierarchy and the management of work and this is true of most firms and workplaces. However, this impact is neither universal nor uniform nor automatic. It essentially comes to play a bigger role in occupations demanding skills and experience and is encountered and taken seriously more often in contexts of career competition and among the middle and higher echelons of the workforce. Other things being equal, length of service in the firm or

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<sup>175</sup> Case study 1. Interview with young Cypriot technician.

<sup>176</sup> Case studies 1, 4, 5.

<sup>177</sup> Case studies 3 and 7.

<sup>178</sup> Case study 6, middle aged concrete truck driver's reference to the split in his company between the 'young' and the 'old' workers.

the sector is more significant for the distribution of privileges and for promotion prospects in the banking rather than the construction industry, in mental and administrative rather than manual and productive work. Although it is difficult to generalise in the absence of quantitative survey data, and exceptions are multiple and many, it is fairly safe to discern two things – a) that seniority does have an impact on workplace relations and b) that this impact is more significant in professional and semi-professional contexts, where beyond retaining one's job there is the desire and potential for upward mobility.

#### 5.4. Differentials of power: skills, pay and social networks

In order to fully grasp the logic of the social cleavages at work we need to discuss specific work as well as non-work related factors of differentiation within sectoral and occupational identities beyond the classic sociological categories of ethnicity, gender and age. These factors can be summed up as differentials of power, usually reflected in formal work-positions, and pay that serve as the skeleton in the construction of the work hierarchy. The significance of the difference between old and new workers, for example, cannot be over-estimated. The years of service in the industry and especially in the firm usually determine the status of each worker in the workplace. Older workers are anyway usually in formal positions of authority as middle managers or assistants. However, even in cases where they are not, they tend to act in that way.<sup>179</sup> Workers who have worked for many years in the firm are usually more relaxed and much less afraid of their employer. They are aware of their accumulated power in the workplace deriving from their work experience, their knowledge of the firm's history and rules of operation, sometimes also their relationship with the firm's big shareholders.<sup>180</sup>

##### 5.4.1. Skills, experience and productivity

Skills, whether in the form of technical know-how, as in the construction industry, or in the form of formal qualifications, as in the banking industry, influence significantly, in many cases even determine, both work-position and remuneration rates. Social skills and character attributes that are functional to work such as liveliness, cooperative spirit, obedience, tidiness, punctuality etc. are also important in

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<sup>179</sup> Case studies 2 and 3: Old Cypriot room cleaners. Case study 3: middle aged bar woman with 14 years of service in the firm and middle aged technician with 13 years of service in the firm, middle aged waitress with 18 years of service in the firm.

<sup>180</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3.

determining the positioning of people in the firm hierarchy and their upward mobility within it. Despite the existence of a substantial subjective dimension in evaluating individual and collective capacity for work, what the management attempts to impose as the rule is objective productivity measurement of actually performed work.<sup>181</sup> It is not so much what the employee can do but what he/she actually does which matters. Qualifications and skills, in other words, do determine ranking within the work hierarchy but should not be seen as absolute categories of differentiation within the workforce as they are usually subsumed within notions of work efficiency and overall collective performance. To be sure, a skilled worker has neither the same status nor power nor prospects as an unskilled one, yet both are subject to the common and overriding requirement of efficient production. Thus skills and qualifications are not always directly relevant, nor do they correspond necessarily to one's security, power or prospects within a firm.

Employers are not always ready to accept the monetary cost associated with their workers' skills, especially when this is not directly linked with labour productivity and work output. The phenomenon of people not finding work because they are overqualified or people fired because they became too costly for their employers should warn us against too direct associations between skills/qualifications and work prospects. The Human Resource Manager of the private bank (case study 4) put it quite bluntly: *'A college diploma or a university degree simply means that somebody took some courses successfully. It doesn't mean that the applicant will be good at work'*. Work experience is infinitely more important than formal qualifications, both when it comes to actual performance and productivity, and correspondingly to the employer's stance *vis-à-vis* an applicant or an employee. Work experience effectively is the field of operationalisation of knowledge and skills, where general and abstract qualities and methods become concrete and empirical procedures and techniques utilised in the interests of production. At the same time, work experience on its own has its limits and needs to be complemented with occasional training schedules in the context of what is nowadays the dominant discourse of 'lifelong learning'. In most of my fieldwork case studies at least some of the staff had participated in seminars and workshops of various sorts, related to occupational sufficiency and with the aim of improving quality of and productivity at work.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> This was most evident in the private bank (Case study 4) which was enforcing quantitative methods of output measurement as part of the evaluation of its employees.

<sup>182</sup> In hotel industry case studies 1 and 3 and in construction industry case study 6 training was under the auspices of the state body Human Resource Development Authority. In the banking industry case studies 4 and 5 training was more specialised and under the auspices of the management and the ETYK.

#### 5.4.2. Social relations and networks

It is more useful to see skills and qualifications serving as a primary differentiation within the workforce. They empower individuals in the labour market, directing them to specific occupations and hence work packages. As such they shape the division of labour, its inherent inequalities and its associated power differentials. On the other hand, they constitute one factor among others in the determination of one's position and power in the workplace. Another important factor influencing one's work position and prospects is one's social network. Family, local and more generally social networks have more significance in smaller societies than they do in large ones. This is because of the primacy of informality (Baldacchino, 1993) as a mode of communication and cooperation. Many of my informants have mentioned to me that they came to the firm because they knew somebody working here or because a friend or relative of theirs knew somebody working here.<sup>183</sup> Some of my informants have linked their promotion prospects directly to their relationship with their departmental manager.<sup>184</sup> Even in the banking industry, where there are more formal procedures of hiring and promotions, the role of familial and social connections is still important.<sup>185</sup> Some of my informants complained about the subjective element of the evaluation procedures and hinted that there is favourable treatment for some as a result of their personal relations with the middle and higher management.<sup>186</sup>

The existence of power differentials is most evident in the relationship between young trainee workers and older more experienced and usually permanent workers. Trainee workers are often ordered around / bossed about and assigned to the most tedious tasks requiring no special skills. Although trainee workers are being trained, that is they are expected to acquire skills through observation and practice, a significant part of their time is spent on what might be called 'donkey work'.<sup>187</sup> This of course is not a new phenomenon. In fact the exploitation of apprentices by their masters who made them do the dirty work instead of allowing and helping them learn the trade has been observed since early modern times. What is interesting to note here is the reproduction of power differentials based

<sup>183</sup> Case study 1, cook, Case study 3, Control Office workers.

<sup>184</sup> Case study 3. Interview with a restaurant worker working for many years in the firm.

<sup>185</sup> Case studies 4 and 5. In the hiring interview, one of the questions asked is whether a member of their family has worked in the bank. In the past this was more pronounced, according to some bank employees, as there was a sort of custom giving children of bank employees a priority *vis-à-vis* other applicants.

<sup>186</sup> Case study 5. Interview with young clerk.

<sup>187</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3, 6, 7. Donkey work involves carrying materials, washing vegetables, beplastering, setting up scaffolding etc.

not only on the different knowledge and work experience levels but also on its consequence, that is the type of work being performed. The power differential between trainee workers and experienced workers is also reflected in the pay gap that exists between them. Furthermore, the fact that trainee workers are young and often foreign comes to reinforce the distance existing between them and the others.<sup>188</sup>

#### 5.4.3. Salaries and wages

The variation in the form and the magnitude of remuneration rates has historically been one of the most important means of allocating the workers into different categories and creating hierarchies on a monetary and status basis. The traditional distinction of the salaried from the waged worker, the former paid on a monthly and the latter on a weekly basis, is still present but has lost most of its descriptive significance in the discussion of labour force segmentations. The servicisation of the economy and the proletarianisation of office work, the expansion of subcontracting and piece work and more generally the enhanced flexibility in employment regimes both with respect to mental and manual work has effectively rendered the segmentations of the workforce more complex than the neat schema of ‘monthly paid labour aristocrats versus weekly paid labour plebians’. Today, formally salaried yet low paid jobs are not the exception any more – cleaners, waiters and sales women, secretaries and couriers are neither few nor the only examples; while some weekly paid occupations involving what is today relatively rare skills are quite highly paid – specialised construction and technical occupations for example.

The difference in remuneration rates produces and reproduces hierarchies not only between but also within occupations. It makes little sense today to talk about the ‘liberal (middle class) professions’. Professionals today are not merely a small specialised social segment enjoying a privileged status within waged labour or a minor petty-bourgeois stake-holder in market capitalism. Although there are to be sure groups of professionals that are exactly that, there are also many others, primarily young postgraduates, who are more or less treated as the proletarians of mental work, employed in the best case scenario on a full-time basis with monthly rates around 1200 - 1500 euros but more usually immersed in part-time, project and piece work, always temporary and being and learning to be in and

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<sup>188</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3.



out of employment for many years.

The wage, as the pillar of the labour relation in the capitalist system, both reflects and structures the power differentials of the labour process. Variation in the wage rates is both the consequence and the vehicle of reproduction of the multi-segmentation of the labour market and the institutionalisation of hierarchies at both the workplace and the industry and economy levels. Whether determined by a collective agreement or individual contract, whether rising automatically with time or not, whether supplemented with over-time work pay and / or rates or not, whether high or low, the wage's centrality in shaping both the material reality and the self and other identification of the workers is universal and undisputed. As far as the employer is concerned, the wage rate is and must be analogous to output and productivity – expectations and demands rise along with the workers' wage.<sup>189</sup> The pressure on relatively highly paid workers can sometimes be huge – leading them often to extra unpaid hours of work in an attempt to show commitment to and appreciation of their employer and demonstrate their professionalism and work ethic.<sup>190</sup> On the bottom of the work hierarchy the pressure to prove that one is worth his/her wage is of a different and more mundane sort. Unpaid extra work is not absent there either – though it does not derive from career ambition or boss appreciation – in the world of irregular and precarious labour, one must show a good worker face in a struggle simply to stay in employment.

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<sup>189</sup> This came out of the interviews with the managers. In case studies 1 and 3 this was most explicit.

<sup>190</sup> The departmental managers in the hotel industry, the foremen in the construction industry and the bankers in the banking industry were the most characteristic examples.

## **CHAPTER SIX: Class composition and political implications**

In the previous chapters I focused on the seven case studies and the information that was produced during the fieldwork. No systematic attempt has been made to generalise the tendencies observed and the narrative has been restricted to the analytic level. In this chapter I will attempt to bring together the issues dealt with in the previous chapters in order to reach some generalised conclusions. In this effort I will utilise some theoretical insights which may frame the empirical data and add some explanatory power to the argument of the thesis.

### **6.1. Workers and their work**

Labour relations in Cyprus are shaped by two contradictory tendencies: a logic of individualisation and a logic of collectivisation. These two tendencies co-exist in space and in time and are reflected in the contractual arrangements that regulate the act of work in the form of personal contracts and collective agreements. However, these contradictory tendencies do not simply refer to institutional arrangements. It is more useful to conceptualise them more broadly as moments in the working experience, as modes of being and acting that make up the working life of individuals. Irrespective of employment status, cooperation through team work induces workers to develop group identities which constitute elementary forms of class solidarity and consciousness. Through the common experience of the daily routinised tasks usually demanded from them, workers develop common codes of communication and interaction. Initially in order to be able to perform the work but gradually in order to be able to bear with it. On the other hand, there is always the option of minding one's business and closing up to oneself as a strategy of survival. The unfolding of this dialectic of individualisation and collectivisation determines to a significant extent both the context and the content of contemporary work.

#### **6.1.1. Doing work**

The workplace is the space where specific work tasks are being performed. However, these tasks are being performed within a field of power relations that crystallises into formal and informal hierarchies. These structural hierarchies are being produced and reproduced in the labour process itself through the acts of coordination, supervision and evaluation of the workers. As mentioned in the previous chapter,

practical knowledge and work experience influences significantly the positioning of people in these work hierarchies. However, in Cyprus it is often important not just 'what you know' but also 'who you know'.<sup>191</sup> The increasing economic importance of informal social networks based on place of origin and kinship in the globalisation age and the network society has been pointed out by Castells (1996). In Cyprus, a small Mediterranean island which has had a rapid modernisation process largely condensed in half a century (Attalides, 1981, Loizos 1985, Christodoulou, 1992), the phenomenon of social solidarity and mutual help on the basis of kinship, place of origin and friendship has not vanished and still plays a role in the construction and maintenance of social relationships. One's contacts and one's reputation are important factors concerning one's chances in the labour market and one's upward mobility prospects within an enterprise. Structural hierarchies are being constructed both within and without the workplace, however it is through the doing of the working tasks that capital, the primary form of power structure, is being reproduced.

Doing work implies the focusing of one's energy, thought and action into the performance of specific, often repetitive tasks. Whether in a kitchen, in an office or a construction site the need to adapt the mind and the body to the work requirements is common. All types of work include to a greater or to a lesser extent some sort of tasks that are performed in a mechanical, not thinking manner. Examples of mechanical work in the hotels include the collection of dishes, the washing of vegetables, the changing of sheets or the carrying of furniture. In the construction site there is the preparation of plaster, the making of forming blocks, the layering of bricks, the carrying of materials and equipment. Similarly in the banks there is the printing of receipts and documents, the filing of forms and the double-checking of accounts. This sort of work can be performed in a more or less 'automatic' way while listening to music, chatting or day-dreaming. On the other hand, there are other tasks which require one's attention and concentration. Examples of this in hotels include cooking, taking orders, repairing equipment and planning and supervising the cleaning process. In the construction sites there is the pouring of cement, the measuring of all sorts and the fitting of pipes and wires. Similarly in the banks there is the dealing with customers, the completion and archiving of forms and the electronic processing of cheques and accounts. This sort of work involves mental focusing on the task, remembering steps and details and thinking through it.

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<sup>191</sup> This was mentioned to me by workers from all three industries examined.

Doing work means different things in different occupations and different temporalities. Front-like work which involves interaction with customers requires not just mental and physical processes but also emotional ones. The manipulation of emotion in the process of capital accumulation often leads to a disjuncture between what one feels and what one is required to display (Hochschild, 1983). This is more pronounced and generalised in service and especially hospitality work where the quality of customer – worker interaction is part of the service being purchased and emotional work is usually difficult, demanding and under-recognised (Urry, 1990). Emotional labour however, does not necessarily or indeed always have negative alienating consequences. Interaction of front-line workers with customers might also be a source of satisfaction for the workers (Wharton, 1996; Korsczynski, 2002). Some of the workers I interviewed, for example, mentioned their contact with the customers as something they 'liked in their job'.<sup>192</sup> The agency of the front-line workers is of fundamental significance since it is they who 'weigh up how much authentic feeling to invest in the performance' (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005:37). At the same time though, that agency takes place within a specific work context shaped by the unequal power relationship between front-line worker and customer and codified by management's 'feeling rules' (Brook, 2009). However, although the expansion of the service industry has led to an expansion of front-line work as well, most workers do not really come into contact with customers and care should be taken not to over-extend the concept of emotional labour when theorising contemporary work.

#### 6.1.2. The time of work

A more generalisable tendency in contemporary work is the expansion of working time as this affects many more workers in all sorts of different occupations and employment statuses. For most immigrant workers, both from EU as well as third country nationals, the norm is 48 hours of work as they work six days per week or ten hours per day.<sup>193</sup> This is sometimes put on paper as well, or at least workers are asked to sign such contractual terms without keeping a copy for themselves,<sup>194</sup> although for many workers the agreement, if any, is an oral one.<sup>195</sup> Many immigrant workers come to Cyprus in order to work and save money so they seek themselves to work long hours. However, the concept of 'over-time work' for many workers, including young un-unionised Cypriots, is not applicable as they are paid

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<sup>192</sup> Case studies 1, 3, 4.

<sup>193</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 6.

<sup>194</sup> Case studies 1, 2.

<sup>195</sup> Case study 2.

according to the same hourly rate for the normal (that is 38 hours per week) as well as the extra working time. Similarly for unionised workers in the hotel industry a sixth working day in a week in the summer is not paid at the rate of 1:1 ½ as it used to be before 1998<sup>196</sup> but it is paid in time off during the winter or in money at the rate 1:1. The flexibilisation of working time in practice really means for hotel employees the expansion of the work-time during the peak season and its contraction during the off-peak season.

The expansion of working time or the incursion of work into free time constitutes a broader global trend (Edwards and Wajcman, 2005; Williams, Pocock and Skinner, 2008) and affects both professional and non-professional work. The changing conception of work-time from clock-time<sup>197</sup> to task-time (Williams, Pocock and Skinner, 2008) is part of the broader trend of flexibilisation and can be observed empirically in the rise of casual, temporary and sub-contract jobs. However, clock-time and task-time are in practice intertwined and can only be separated analytically. It is not just professional and tertiary educated workers that work on the basis of task-time. Even workers whose working day is defined by clock-time are subject to task-oriented schedules. This was observed in my fieldwork in the case of the subcontract room cleaners, who were paid on the basis of the number of rooms they cleaned,<sup>198</sup> in the hotel and construction workers (both direct and subcontract), whose break time was taken not at a specific time but according to the requirements of the work plan,<sup>199</sup> in the extra hours worked by many workers in cases of unexpected workload and in the piece work system in general.

Another global trend, in addition to the expansion of working time, is the increased mobility of workers in the labour market, not only across but also within national borders. This is usually seen as the corollary of increased labour flexibility that makes frequent occupational change necessary and thus normal, and establishes the notion of 'employability' as a required quality as opposed to employment as

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<sup>196</sup> The 1998 memorandum was a conscious retreat of the trade unions in order to avoid mass redundancies. The gain for the workers in this 1998 memorandum was the consent of the employers to the creation of the Welfare Fund (an extra 1% on the wage paid by the employers to a fund administered by a common committee of employers and trade unionists). Interviews with trade unions' sectoral secretaries (Georgiades from PEO and Mihael from SEK). Today, for unionised workers, the form of compensation for Sunday work and for holidays that coincide with a day off or a weekend remain open to further negotiation, as non-pay issues, even after the last agreement of 2010 (Soumeli, 2011a).

<sup>197</sup> The significance of time in instituting labour discipline, defining work that is in terms of work time has been analysed by Thompson (1983) [1967] in his seminal study of industrial capitalism.

<sup>198</sup> Case study 1.

<sup>199</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7.

a right (Mitropoulos, 2008 p. 83). The end of the ‘life job’ renders ‘life-long training’ as the only means by which workers can survive in the difficult conditions of high unemployment and a competitive labour market. This however varies enormously across sectors, occupations, level of skills and pay and generalisations are not easy. In fact, for a significantly large segment of the labour force, contrary to the popular notion of the short-termist character of contemporary employment (Sennet, 1998), the notion of ‘the permanent job’ is still applicable in Cyprus. In my fieldwork I found many workers who had been working for their current employer for more than a decade and did not consider leaving (or being asked to leave) when asked about their future.<sup>200</sup> However, for another larger segment of the labour force, that is positioned on the lower echelons of the labour hierarchy, permanency is either encompassed in the dream of upward social mobility<sup>201</sup> or it is irrelevant as the frequent change of employers is more or less the norm.<sup>202</sup> Moving from one employer to another, whether voluntarily, semi-voluntarily or involuntarily, is a disturbing social condition, especially if a period of unemployment<sup>203</sup> and job searching accompanies the transition from one job to the other. Precarity, the social condition in which a significant section of the labour force in Cyprus finds itself, is, however, to a certain extent moderated by the strength of the institutions of the family for the Cypriots and the ethnic community for the non-Cypriots, which act like safety nets, often overseeing and sometimes directing labour mobility.

### 6.1.3. Segmentation at work

So far I have been assuming labour segmentation and have been talking about the factors of its production/constitution and its consequences in terms of labour contracts and official registration, trade union membership and managerial function, skill levels and work experience, and gender, ethnic and occupational identities. Now, before the discussion of workers' interests, I will attempt to examine the empirical relevance and the analytic utility of the core-periphery schema which is associated with theories of flexibility (Harvey 1989, Standing 1999, Burchell, Lapidó and Wilkinson, 2002). The dichotomy between a permanent core and a temporary periphery is useful to the extent that it is

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<sup>200</sup> Case studies 1, 3, 4, 5, 6.

<sup>201</sup> Permanency is included in the common description of the ‘good job’.

<sup>202</sup> This was most evident in case studies 1 and 2, where in my follow-up visit there 3-4 months after the fieldwork, I found an almost entirely different workforce.

<sup>203</sup> The global economic crisis has resulted in lay-offs in the hospitality and especially in the construction industries in 2009, raising unemployment levels and thus exerting more pressure on the labour movement forcing it into more moderate demands for pay increases (Soumeli, 2011 [2010]).

approached more as an analytic bi-polarity rather than an empirical reality. This is because, in certain cases, the existence of a large ‘grey area’ of the semi-periphery<sup>204</sup> or the universalism of contractual labour arrangements<sup>205</sup> renders the schema core-periphery inadequate or even irrelevant. However, seasonality in the hotels and subcontracting in the construction industry do create a specific form of segmentation based on varying levels of jobs security which can be analysed by means of the core-periphery schema. And moving beyond the fieldwork case studies, which are skewed towards big firms and workplaces, when one takes into account the family business sector which is relatively big in Cyprus, the core-periphery schema is also useful since the distinction between permanent family members and casual (usually immigrant) labour is very common in small firms.<sup>206</sup>

In the hotels, at the top of the labour hierarchy there is the ‘skeleton staff’ who constitute the core of the workforce and are Cypriots, usually skilled, unionised and often having supervisory duties as well.<sup>207</sup> These are permanent employees who are also included in the sectoral Provident Fund as an extra insurance. At the bottom of the labour hierarchy there is the ‘seasonal staff’ who constitute the periphery of the workforce and are usually non-Cypriots, less skilled and un-unionised.<sup>208</sup> In the construction sites, at the top of the labour hierarchy are the foremen, the subcontractors and the skilled direct workers who constitute the core of the workforce, the latter being usually unionized.<sup>209</sup> At the bottom of the labour hierarchy there are the subcontract workers who are usually non- Cypriot and non-unionised, constituting effectively a peripheral casual force.<sup>210</sup> This dichotomy cannot be ignored when discussing the relation of workers to their work since the different employment regimes and the different sort of work performed leads to a different experience of working time. Labour does not mean the same thing for a core as it does for a peripheral worker. In schematic terms, for the former it is a source of life stability, involving guaranteed income and social protection, potentially upward social mobility, organizational challenges and work planning. For the latter, on the other hand it is usually a source of stress and anxiety, in a precarious social and economic context, involving usually tedious, repetitive and unpleasant tasks and without real prospects of escape.

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<sup>204</sup> Case study 3, 6.

<sup>205</sup> Case studies 4, 5.

<sup>206</sup> This is the case in restaurants, bakeries, small and medium size super-markets etc.

<sup>207</sup> Case studies 1, 2.

<sup>208</sup> Case studies 1, 2.

<sup>209</sup> Case study 6.

<sup>210</sup> Case study 6.

The core and periphery schema is useful at the macro level as well, as it can be used in an attempt to account for the class identity of various worker strata according to their employment relationship, role and function in the labour process. Extending the core and periphery schema from the enterprise to the sectoral or even the economy-wide level might be useful in describing the variations not only in job security but also income and status enjoyed by different groups of workers. The core and periphery schema is undoubtedly related to occupation and hence skill. However, there are two other important variables at work here: job tenure and unionisation. The example of cleaners is indicative. Some middle-aged women cleaners in banks and hotels who are unionised and have been working for many years belong to the core labour segment and this is reflected in their income, status as well as their duties. Salaries for these workers range around 1000-1200 euros and they have some supervisory duties, whether formal or informal, and they are treated with respect.<sup>211</sup> On the other hand, subcontract young cleaners, who are typically newly hired, belong to the periphery and this is reflected in their income, status and duties. These workers earn 600-800 euros, are treated more coldly by management and fellow workers and are more strictly supervised.<sup>212</sup> The semi-periphery is empirically observable as the semi-skilled Cypriots (or non-Cypriots who have been in Cyprus for a long time) who are employed in non-key posts in the firm and enjoy some but not all the rights and benefits that core workers enjoy. In the big hotels for example, a semi-peripheral worker receives a 13<sup>th</sup> salary and has paid holidays like the skeleton staff, but is excluded from the Provident Fund.<sup>213</sup>

## 6.2. Workers and their interests

Identification of the employees with the interests of the firm, that is those of the employers, is essentially the dominant ideology. This is usually implied or taken for granted in mainstream Business and Human Resource Management literature, this is often stated explicitly in the mass media and this is what the middle managers and their assistants as well as some workers expressed directly or indirectly in the fieldwork interviews. However, in the discussions I have had with many workers, it was clear that they distinguished their interests from those of their employers and some even considered them as being antagonistic. Regarding the trade unions the response was mixed. Some viewed the trade unions as representing their interests while some others viewed the trade unions as being too close to the

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<sup>211</sup> Case studies 2, 3 and the branch level in case study 4. Also case study 1 before the 1999 strike.

<sup>212</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3 and district level in case study 4.

<sup>213</sup> Case studies 1, 3.



employers and too distant from them (see chapter 4). In this sub-chapter I will discuss workers' interests at workplace, economic-trade union and legal-political levels.

### 6.2.1. Ideological orientations

The identification of employer-employee interests rests on the notion of 'the firm' and its abstraction as an entity over and above its constituent human actors whose agency and action essentially produces and reproduces the firm as a micro social structure. It is more commonly found amongst middle managers and their assistants, who are effectively the key agents in this reproduction.<sup>214</sup>

*'New workers are hired on a trial basis. To see if they like the hotel, and the hotel to see if it likes them. It is mutual'.*<sup>215</sup> The 'hotel' in this discourse becomes a unified entity of management and staff together deciding if they like the new recruits or not. In reality of course the 'hotel' means essentially the hotel's management. In the words of another middle manager: *'We as a firm, as an organisation, have proposed to our people to form their own (firm) trade union'.*<sup>216</sup> In this discourse the 'firm' again becomes 'we' while 'our people' refers effectively to the employees, especially those who are considered to be particularly loyal to the management. These workers constitute essentially a management auxiliary group used in the disciplining process through the provision of information about their colleagues to the firm's management.<sup>217</sup>

The identification of the middle management with the firm is not really an option. It is a condition, both for their appointment and their maintenance in that position. This brings about specific forms of social behavior vis-à-vis the personnel as well as specific psychological states. *'I am stressed as if the business is mine'.*<sup>218</sup> In the banks, which are essentially huge organisations with more impersonal management structures, the identification with the 'firm' takes different forms. There is a bigger attachment to the 'job', which is socially considered to be a 'well paid', 'permanent' and 'career' job for many people. Most new recruits are university graduates and look forward to their advancement in the work hierarchy. Hence their degree of identification with the 'firm' is directly associated with their

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<sup>214</sup> All case studies.

<sup>215</sup> Case study 1, restaurants' manager.

<sup>216</sup> Case study 3, bars' manager.

<sup>217</sup> Case studies 1 and 3. Interviews with middle managers. Some workers also referred to the phenomenon of 'spies' or 'karfia' meaning 'back-stabbers'

<sup>218</sup> Case study 6, assistant foreman.

personal prospects within it.<sup>219</sup> The more structured industrial relations system in the banking sector and the existence of functional, as opposed to nominal, personnel management departments limits the numerous middle managers' authority and arbitration to the work and not the employment aspects of labour. Hence their degree of identification with the firm is limited to the general effort to increase output and productivity through their organisational and supervisory roles.

The social hegemony of what in labour relations literature is called a 'unitarist' perspective was most evident in the banking sector case studies, as mentioned in chapter 4. However, this hegemony is neither total nor robust enough. Its fragility was made obvious to me through many interviews in all three industries. As the discussions entered the realm of rights and interests, even employees (including middle managers) who generally adhered to a liberal conception of labour relations acknowledged the divergence of interests in practice between employer and employees.<sup>220</sup> Even employees who talked to me about the 'good character' and the 'generosity' of their employer at other points in the interview referred to the trade unions as the protector of their interests and rights from potential and actual violations by their employer.<sup>221</sup> The antagonism of interests between employers and workers exists as a repressed reality, as an underlying condition, that surfaces during collective bargaining, provoking tensions and industrial unrest. During my fieldwork interviews, some workers were quite explicit. *'They (the bosses) do not see us as employees. They see us as money making machines'*.<sup>222</sup> The distance separating them from the managers, whom they considered as being with the bosses' side, was clear.<sup>223</sup> *'The chef has been promoted recently and that is why he is keeping his distance from us'*.<sup>224</sup> More politicized workers, such as workplace trade union representatives, responded to the diachronic employers' argument about the problem of the high payroll cost by pointing to the managers' high remuneration.<sup>225</sup> With respect to the capitalists some workers were vehement. *'How much money should the hotel owners make? They provide for their children and their grandchildren. Need they provide for their great-grandchildren as well? Let their great-grandchildren work a bit'*.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Case studies 4, 5.

<sup>220</sup> Case study 4, transactions manager.

<sup>221</sup> Case study 2, Housekeeper. Case study 3, chef de partie.

<sup>222</sup> Case study 3, cook B.

<sup>223</sup> Case study 3, porter. In an interesting spatial distinction of the upstairs and basement people, whose functional distance in the labour process was also reflected in their place of work in the hotel.

<sup>224</sup> Case study 2, barman.

<sup>225</sup> Case study 3, technician A, workplace trade union committee.

<sup>226</sup> Case study 3, sous chef.

The trade unions constitute essentially the organisational form in which workers' collective interests are represented and protected. The way this takes place for the unionised segment of the labour force has been examined in chapter four. However, not all workers view the trade unionists positively as their representatives or the protectors of their interests. There are workers, both unionised but especially non-unionised, who have a negative opinion of the trade unions. Many workers see them as 'sold out to the employers' or 'indifferent' to their interests. This derives from the trade unionists' mediating role between management and labour, promoting compromise solutions to both individual as well as collective interest matters. The dual role of trade unions as both vehicles of expression of workers' interests as well as integration mechanisms of the working class in the bourgeois state gives rise to two distinct perspectives. The one can be termed as left-wing or radical, focusing on the class interests and criticising the trade unionists according to the degree to which their action diverts away from the side of labour to the side of capital in search of compromise. The other can be termed right-wing or conservative and is more prevalent amongst middle managers, focusing on firm/industry interests and criticising the trade unions according to the degree to which their action disturbs industrial peace and productivity raises through making the work of management difficult. These two analytically distinct and politically antagonistic perspectives in reality inter-penetrate one another, agreeing on issues such as the 'self interest of the trade unions'<sup>227</sup> or even accusations of 'corruption'.<sup>228</sup>

#### 6.2.2. Structural realities

At the structural level, the trade unions constitute a manifestation of class power, both actual (during strikes and protests) and potential (during negotiations and consultations) as well as a stabilising systemic force (during everyday normality and routine work). The trade unions are simultaneously forces that challenge capital as well as forces integral to the maintenance of its hegemony. They are institutions of the working class, yet they provide the conditions for capital accumulation by ensuring the smooth functioning of the labour process. As mentioned in chapter four, the trade unionists 'solve' the problems that arise (between management and labour) and thus facilitate the normal continuation of production. The aim of their intervention in the labour process is to serve both the benefit of the workers and the benefit of the industry. The unintended consequence of their intervention, or the actual result of their always partial success, is the fortification of the segmentation of the labour force through

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<sup>227</sup> Case study 1, maintenance manager. Case study 3, non-unionised barman. Case study 3, technician B.

<sup>228</sup> Case study 1, bar manager.

the institutionalisation of the two categories of workers – those included in and those excluded from the world of rights and benefits.

Precarious workers, that is those who do not enjoy the rights and benefits of stable/permanent employment, as already mentioned constitute now a significant section of the contemporary working class in Cyprus. Although precarity as a social condition affects fewer people in Cyprus, compared to other Mediterranean countries, due to the rapid growth and global integration of the Cypriot economy effected in the last three decades, it still defines the life circumstances for one segment of the island's population. As I noted in chapter 4, the precariat is a transnational concept, theoretically as well as empirically. More importantly, it is not a sociological concept that can be defined according to positive criteria of categorisation, quantified and measured. The precariat is primarily a political concept that refers to specific non-regulated forms of class struggle, organised and un-organised, individual as well as collective. The conception of the precarious workers' interests is shaped by the condition of vulnerability in which they find themselves vis-à-vis their employer. Having no trade union membership and/or lacking the relevant professional qualifications which can attribute status, membership in associations and most importantly labour market power, the precarious workers are essentially on their own. Their interests are not taken into consideration in the collective bargaining process and they are effectively a working class segment which is not represented in the political process. The weak position of the precarious workers as individuals, however, should not obscure their centrality as a social group in the labour process. Peripheral workers are for sure exchangeable in a firm, but no firm can function without a periphery.

One of the main functions of the trade unions is to safeguard the implementation of protective labour legislation and the collective agreements. In cases of violations (either of labour law or collective agreements) by the employers, the trade unions complain to the Ministry and call for its intervention. Some managers (speaking on behalf of the employers) complained about the trade unions interfering not only into their business but also into the state's business.<sup>229</sup> It is interesting to note that some workers were worried that the entry into the EU was bound to diminish the role and power of the trade unions.<sup>230</sup> This protective role of the trade unions is probably most important in low-paid occupations (such as sales workers), where the trade unions observe the adherence of the employers to minimum

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<sup>229</sup> Case studies 3 and 6.

<sup>230</sup> Case study 6. Interview with an account's office worker.

wage legislation.<sup>231</sup> Nevertheless, it is often more generally the case that in the absence of trade unions, the employers are more likely to violate labour law and collective agreements and get away with it. It is much easier, for example, to dismiss workers in a non-unionised workplace, or non-unionised worker in a unionised place. In cases of arbitrary dismissals of trade union members, though, the case is more likely to go to the labour court.<sup>232</sup>

### 6.2.3. Political prospects

The dual role of the trade unions, acting both as a political pressure group on behalf of the workers, as well as the mediating force that incorporates the workers to the bourgeois state and its laws is a historical and a global phenomenon. What seems to be the more specifically contemporary Cypriot case is their defensive role, trying more to safeguard the achievements of the past rather than to expand them for the future. *'Our existing collective agreement is very good. We do not want to change it. We want to get it implemented'*.<sup>233</sup> The trade unions' prioritisation of the enforcement of labour law and the Industrial Relations Code, their obedience in other words to the parameters of the existing labour relations system, is illustrative of their own conception of workers' interests as compatible with the 'economy's' and the 'country's' interests. And if this to be expected from SEK and DEOK, which are affiliated to the bourgeois political parties, DIKO-DISI and EDEK respectively, why is this also the case with PEO and AKEL, the only trade union that refers to itself as a 'class union' and the only political party that continues to refer to itself as being communist and belonging to the 'working people'? As mentioned in chapter four, PEO-AKEL is not comfortable with the class-compromise implications of its actual policy of social partnership because this contradicts its traditional 'class war' socialist rhetoric. The discrepancy, however, between the 'communist ideology' and the reformist and pragmatic politics of the Cypriot left (Panayiotou, 1999) has been and continues to be real, and perhaps also functional or at least instrumental for the overall needs of the current socio-economic system. As one of my informants put it: *'Capital and the state are the same thing. As you see today the businessmen behind Papadopoulos, you will see them tomorrow behind Christofias. I am a left-winger, but at the end of the day, whoever gets elected, we will still be here to be exploited'*.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>231</sup> Interview with PEO retail trade and industry sectoral secretary. The minimum wage has been raised in 2010 from 791 to 835 euros per month for the newly hired in sales, security and child care work. However, it is often being violated directly and indirectly by the employers, who are openly opposed to it and want to abolish it.

<sup>232</sup> Trade unions direct their members to specific lawyers, usually also M.P.s, who represent them in the labour court.

<sup>233</sup> Interview with SEK trade unionist of the hotel industry.

<sup>234</sup> Case study 3, technician A, workplace trade union committee

AKEL's political moderation and actual social-democratic practice allows it to collaborate with bourgeois parties such as DIKO and EDEK, the so called patriotic-democratic powers, rising even to executive power in 2008 with the assumption of the Presidency by Christofias. AKEL's focus and emphasis is squarely on electoral strategy and tactics, often neglecting or ignoring theoretical and ideological considerations (Charalambous, 2009). As I have already noted, yet want to repeat, the class and class struggle dimension in AKEL's politics today is either downplayed or used rhetorically in an attempt to claim left-wing credentials and achieve radical legitimisation. Even so, these are often distorted as class comes to be interpreted more as 'class family background' and class struggle more as AKEL's political 'competition and conflict with the Right', that is DISI and EVROKO. For example, Christofias proposed himself as the 'man of the people' who would protect the workers from 'neoliberalism' both emanating from the EU and promoted by the national Right. He insisted that he is a communist, albeit one that would manage and not overthrow the capitalist system, postponing indefinitely the 'socialist transformation' as this is impossible now 'before the solution' and will also be impossible 'immediately after the solution'.

Then perhaps the question from a socialist perspective would be: what about left of AKEL? If AKEL and PEO have taken more or less the reformist social democratic road shouldn't there have been some sort of a left wing opposition, both internal and external? Why has no serious political force or trade union emerged that would embrace radical workers' activism and class war politics? This is to be sure more a political rather than an academic question and in any case beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless I will not refrain from attempting a tentative answer or rather pointing out the context in which the answer might be sought. The key factor here is the survival of the adherence to communist ideology on behalf of AKEL – although this is largely rhetorical, the occasional mobilisation gymnastics and the links with more radical Turkish Cypriot, European and international forces allows AKEL to maintain the image of a radical left wing party. AKEL's glorious history and huge size complement this and dissuade various fringe forces to its left from embarking upon a serious project of building an alternative left wing political force.<sup>235</sup> Then even within the existing groupings left of

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<sup>235</sup> Left of AKEL in Cyprus consists primarily of some extra-parliamentary social and political circles and groupings of a Trotskyist or anarchist/anti-authoritarian orientation. The Trotskyists became relatively strong in the late 1970s and early 1980s but were gradually weakened and split into many factions. The anarchists/anti-authoritarians emerged in the 1980s but never succeeded to organise themselves into something big and serious. Aside from these two overtly political poles there is also a broader stratum of activists involved in alternative culture, human rights and the peace movement but again it lacks organisational muscle and political unity, or even merely political clarity, and will that may allow it to

AKEL, despite references to class and class struggle, their interest in labour issues per se is somewhat limited.<sup>236</sup> This is a more generalised societal phenomenon, beyond the radical circles that is, that puts Cyprus into a sharp contrast with other Mediterranean countries, Italy and Greece for example, where the class dimension of politics continues to be important despite and amidst the neo-liberal and de-politicisation climate of the 1990s and 2000s.

### 6.3. Workers and authority

The web of power relations in the labour process has already been sketched out in chapter 5, which examined the construction and reproduction of hierarchies at the workplace and the labour market levels. There are objective structures of authority at work both at the organisational and the ideological levels, manifested in the control of labour power by the firms' management and the trade union bureaucracies and in the divisions of the labour force according to skills and education, age and tenure, gender and ethnicity. However, these objective structures of authority are not sociological givens as their substantiation depends on the intensity of class struggle and the politics of individual and collective resistance, both at the micro (workplace) and the macro (societal) levels.

#### 6.3.1. Resisting management

The firm's formal hierarchical structure of management, for example, is being challenged by the workers in multiple ways, both consciously as well as unconsciously. This does not lead to its neutralisation nor does it make it irrelevant, but it does render it a relative rather than an absolute matter. When some workers defy their supervisors' orders, more often ignoring them quietly rather than rejecting them openly, they are effectively questioning their authority over the utilisation of their labour power during work-time. In order for workers to be able to do this, however, it requires them to draw upon their available social and psychological resources in order to overcome their fear and break (momentarily) the disciplinary order of the workplace. Insubordination is often unpredictable but it is neither accidental nor irrational. Its logic derives from the immanent struggle for autonomy and self-

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constitute itself as a significant political force.

<sup>236</sup> There have been in the past some attempts by individual Trotskyists to organise small strikes at the place of their work and they do as groups occasionally express their support to various workers' struggles; yet there has been and there is no systematic attempt by activists to organise workers at workplace or sectoral, let alone national, level for radical purposes either within or without the existing trade unions. The opposition against nationalism and the division of Cyprus at home and imperialism in the broader area of the Middle East takes up most of the activists' time and energy.

control over one's time and energy, over one's body and mind. And this struggle of workers for their escape from capital's ordering is both logically and historically prior to the capitalist valorisation process.<sup>237</sup>

However, breaking the formal hierarchical structure of control in a workplace does not bring about the destruction of authority nor even the abolition of hierarchy as an organisational principle. To be sure there are many instances of mutual help through exchange of information, completion of each other's tasks and horizontal relations of cooperation amongst colleagues observed in all case studies.<sup>238</sup> These collaborative acts might erode the management establishment if and when they take place immediately and directly, as they undermine the ultimate power of management to organise, via orders, the labour process. Nevertheless there are often new informal hierarchies being created based on leadership/responsibility roles assumed by some on the basis of their work experience, confidence and social status.

### 6.3.2. Resisting work

The most characteristic form of workers' resistance is not against the hierarchy at work but against work itself. The classic means whereby workers resist their social function and role, as workers, is when they avoid work, when they refuse in practice to offer their labour to their employer. Workers' resistance to work takes many concrete forms such as absenteeism, going slow and sabotage. Instances of these forms of resistance are common and take place in all sorts of waged labour settings, involving both the 'aristocratic' and the 'slave' labourers. Absenteeism, for example, takes various forms: not appearing to work (faked illness, forgetting, not waking up),<sup>239</sup> coming to work late,<sup>240</sup> or disappearing during work hours with or without permission.<sup>241</sup> This is effectively challenging the order of work-time and trying consciously to reduce its length. Going slow, on the other hand, challenges the intensity of work-time and undermines the employer goal of an ever-increasing labour productivity. Going slow refers essentially to the strategy of saving one's energy and coping with the heavy work-load. Often

<sup>237</sup> This idea has been essentially developed by the Italian Marxist autonomia school in the 1970s. For a historical review of the Italian movement and the theoretical development of Autonomist Marxism see Wright (2002). More recently this idea has been taken up and used by Bonefeld and Holloway (1995) and re-articulated and specified explicitly by Holloway (1995).

<sup>238</sup> Intra and inter-departmental collaboration amongst colleagues is often informal, circumventing the middle management.

<sup>239</sup> Case study 2, foreign workers.

<sup>240</sup> Case study 1, 3.

<sup>241</sup> Case study 6, assistant foreman, referring to his previous big construction site where the workers used to hide.



workers have no option but to go-slow as they understand that there is always a new task when they finish their current one. The order to 'work faster' is probably the most common one by those who supervise workers.<sup>242</sup> In fact, as I pointed out earlier, the shift from paid work-time to paid task-time which is observed in the context of outsourcing, subcontracting and commission systems aims at precisely that: to intensify the pace of work done.<sup>243</sup>

Avoiding intensified work, however, is not always an option for the workers. The fear of being fired is ever present in the private sector, largely defining the parameters of workers' resistance. In certain cases though, a worker might simply burst without thinking the consequences. The case of a Pontian worker in case study 7 is illustrative. *'I was working for X. He used to shout to me to work faster. One day, I shouted back to him and he fired me'*.<sup>244</sup> Usually though the resources needed by workers in order to overcome their fear and articulate their resistance to the employer and his agents comes from a realistic assessment and knowledge of their strength as providers of labour. When one room cleaner was directed by the housekeeper to the hotel manager in an attempt to discipline her she said to him: *'You think that I am afraid that you will fire me? You, who have an office job, should be afraid. Look at [outside the manager's office window the view was a series of hotels in line] how many toilets there are for me to clean?'*<sup>245</sup> This sort of insubordination cannot be explained away as a spontaneous revolt. It surely does involve a logic of 'recklessness' leading to an offensive stance, however that often presupposes a prior awareness of one's socio-economic power and position in the class structure. The case of four young Polish workers in case study 2 is also illustrative. When they realised that they could not cope with the bad working conditions and their boss's aggressive behaviour they decided to leave and started looking for another hotel in the same area to employ them and soon deserted their boss during the peak of the peak season.

#### 6.4. Workers against capital

The pressure of work and the feeling of exploitation might at certain times proceed beyond 'avoidance' and 'escape' into more confrontational channels involving acts of sabotage as revenge to

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<sup>242</sup> All case studies.

<sup>243</sup> See, for example, the room cleaners in case study 1 who are paid per room cleaned. Or the piece work by some builders in case study 7.

<sup>244</sup> Case study 7, interview with unskilled worker who had been hired the previous day.

<sup>245</sup> Case study 3, middle-aged Cypriot woman room cleaner.

‘*what they are doing to us*’.<sup>246</sup> Small thefts, always present in the hospitality sector<sup>247</sup> should also be seen in this light, both as expropriation as well as re-appropriation of part of the value produced. Sabotage is probably the most intense form of class struggle and can only be based on a deep consciousness of the antagonism of interests between labour and capital, between ‘us and them’. From a political and theoretical perspective sabotage constitutes the heart of the revolutionary moment, materialising the historical rupture of the ‘refusal of labour’ (Tronti, 1976 [1965]) and putting forward the question of proletarian self-valorisation as the means of the realisation of communism (Negri, 1986, [1977]).

From an epistemological perspective it is difficult to measure or analyse sabotage from the stance of the outsider doing non-participant observation, which was the primary method in this dissertation's fieldwork. This is not only because it is essentially illegal and socially condemned, but also because it is done secretly and actors are not generally prepared to talk about it. It is also because in order for one to conceptualise it and do it, or do it and then conceptualise it, one has to experience conditions of exploitation and oppression; and in order for sabotage to be part of a worker's process of self-awareness and a moment of conscious resistance he/she must be able to identify his or her employer as the basic cause for the injustice suffered. And from an ontological perspective, in order to write about it, one must shed all pretenses of political neutrality and academic distance and engage him/herself in everyday workplace struggles, participating as well as reporting them.<sup>248</sup>

#### 6.4.1 Collective action

If sabotage is the most intense form of class struggle, violating directly the institution of private property, the strike is the most extensive one in its consequences and its threat is the most politically advanced manifestation of challenge to the supremacy of capital. Unlike sabotage, which is by definition outside the bounds of and usually even opposed to trade unionism, the strike constitutes the ultimate function of trade unionism as the *par excellence* expression of class struggle. Strike activity is not a common practice, let alone a typical trade union choice, in Cyprus as I claimed in chapter 4.

<sup>246</sup> Case study 3, public spaces woman cleaner referring to ‘leaving the lights switched on’.

<sup>247</sup> Case studies 1, 2, 3.

<sup>248</sup> Like anonymous worker bloggers for example. There are many such examples in Greece – e.g. <http://rizospastes.blogspot.com/>, (education) <http://ssmthess.espivblogs.net/>, (catering) <http://repo-zine.blogspot.com/>, (retail trade) to name just a few. In Cyprus there is currently nothing of this sort. There are various political blogs that may talk about workers' struggles but no workers' blogs focusing on their own workplace political struggles.

Yet the weapon of the strike remains central to trade unionism, as it sets the context both of the past and the future. Trade unionists have no other option but to talk about the strike both as ‘past struggle’ and as a future possibility/threat, drawing the lines both vis-à-vis their membership and vis-à-vis the employers during collective bargaining.

The strike is something that ‘*will shake them*’ and there is no middle ground for neutrality.<sup>249</sup> A strike, when things are eventually led towards that direction, is effectively a workplace war. It is often a psychologically disturbing situation as social relations become antagonistic while the two camps are being formed. ‘*I would never want to live through such an experience again. If there is a strike in the future I would rather stay at home*’.<sup>250</sup> In such cases of class polarisation, one is forced to choose and join a camp and is subjected to social and political pressure both from the strike leaders as well as from the firm's management.<sup>251</sup> As the open class struggle unfolds the stakes are set high. One might lose one's job or the social esteem of one's striking colleagues and risks being subjected to social ridicule either way.<sup>252</sup>

The trade unions often want to avoid the social and political implications of the workplace war and try to have it both ways: both a struggle against the employer but not a struggle against the firm, against the capitalist but not against capital. In any case for the trade unions as political entities, irrespective of the opinions of the young professional trade unionists who might be radicalised in the course of the struggle,<sup>253</sup> a strike is the ultimate step, not only something which must normally be avoided, but even when the need for it arises, something which must be contained and controlled. The phenomenon of the

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<sup>249</sup> Case study 1, young barman. When a colleague of his pointed to the possibility of the foreign workers breaking the strike, his response was ‘We will force them to come out with us’.

<sup>250</sup> Case study 1, storekeeper referring to the 1999 strike.

<sup>251</sup> See earlier reference on case study 3 (housekeeper and housekeeper's assistants concerning the latter's participation in the last strike).

<sup>252</sup> Case study 1, head barman telling me how his striking colleagues and the trade unionists distributed leaflets in his village, shaming him as a class traitor for his strike-breaking role during the 1999 strike. In the cases of the last two extended strikes in retail trade (2008) and restaurants chain (2009) the management asked from its non-striking/strike-breaking employees to stage anti-union and pro-employer protests which appeared on television.

<sup>253</sup> Case study 1. See, for example, the SEK trade unionist in the 1999 strike who came up with this analysis which was written and posted as a comment behind a photograph depicting 8 policemen. ‘The police had as their mission to break the strikers' morale as if they were terrorists. Every day there were about 35 policemen, something which proves that Glafkos Clerides' government wanted to break the strike at all costs. They reached the stage where instead of the police guarding the green line, they were guarding Mister X (the employer)’. The fact that this trade unionist was right-wing, formally and generally supporting Clerides' government makes this comment more interesting as a sign of political realignment during a particular struggle. Also see the PEO trade unionist father and son in the restaurant chain strike in 2009 who wanted to shame the employer and take the strike to the end.

partial or symbolic strike arises precisely out of this trade union concern to balance two contradictory political imperatives: on the one hand, to mobilise the workers and inflict damage on the employer so as to force him into compromise and, on the other hand, to prevent overt labour militancy and hostility towards the employer that is bound to have long-term negative consequences in the post-strike work life. In the words of a trade unionist: *‘We want to put some pressure on the firm’s owner, not to lead the firm into closure’*.<sup>254</sup> This demonstrates quite vividly both the presuppositions as well as the priorities of trade unionism – accepting the capitalist framework and the fundamental structural inequality between capital and labour and thinking always in post-strike terms of ‘normality’. For some workers, though, the phenomenon of a partial or symbolic strike is a joke.<sup>255</sup> They explained to me that this is not a ‘proper strike’ and that it is ridiculous to have some of the staff with pickets outside but the hotel to function with some people in every department.<sup>256</sup> When I confronted the trade unionists in my follow-up interviews they responded that the hotel could not really function properly and that the strike was noticed both by the management and the customers.

These symbolic or partial strikes usually have a warning character and come before or during the negotiations for the renewal of the sectoral collective agreements. Although the negotiations take place at national level, the strikes are organised at district level assemblies. But really these assemblies essentially authorise or rather legitimise the power of the trade unions’ bureaucracies to choose the timing and length as well as the workplaces that will be involved in the strike. As one of my informants participating in such assemblies told me, in one case the order for the strike changed at the last minute.<sup>257</sup> The limited activity of the workplace committees, mentioned in chapter 4, does not only cause the distance between the trade unions and their membership but also legitimises, reproduces and exacerbates the democratic deficit in the process of organised class struggle. The democratic deficit in the trade unions is to be sure a subject in its own right and cannot be sufficiently analysed in the context of this dissertation. However, the tendency of concentration of power in the hands of the professional trade unionists was clear in the last two ‘normal’ or ‘real’ strikes, that is arising out of workplace dynamics and being indefinite in duration, that took place in 2008 and 2009. The fact that there were no strike committees formed and that there was no striker in the negotiating team,

<sup>254</sup> Trade unionist, Case study 3.

<sup>255</sup> Case study 3, technician, head waiter, sous-chef amongst others.

<sup>256</sup> Case study 3. In one case it was the departmental managers themselves sending their staff into the picket lines in turns during the last strike.

<sup>257</sup> Case study 3. A strike was supposed to take place in that hotel but at the last minute it was cancelled and another hotel was chosen. Technician, workplace committee member.

comprised solely of trade unionists, is illustrative of the hierarchical representation structure that organised class struggle is forced through.

Collective action against capital is epitomised in the strike. The strike is ultimately a site and a concentrated moment of class struggle. Even though the trigger might be local, as organised conflict develops, the moment of rupture is diffused out of the workplace into the broader society in which it is embedded. The implication of this for an analysis of 'the strike' is that it should be approached as a broader social antagonism in which both workers and employers command a variety of resources of mobilisation and actually engage in various repertoires of (conflictual) action (Tilly and Tilly 1998) from their broader social and historical context. The case of the last two strikes in a big retail store and a big restaurant chain in 2008 and 2009 can yield interesting observations. In both cases the workers' priority, once the strike started by a minority of workers (as many backed down at the last minute and refused to participate), was to prevent the customers from entering the shops. Once the two camps were formed, the strikers' appeals were primarily directed towards the customers and the citizens rather than to their working colleagues and the working class. There were of course references to 'class solidarity' and the 'interests of the working people', and in the case of the big retail store strike there was actual solidarity by the port workers, who refused to unload the containers of that particular 'firm'. However, neither the strikers nor the trade unionists made a systematic attempt to extend the strike by provoking other solidarity strikes in other firms of the sector, let alone other sectors.

It is interesting to note that it was the employers and not the strikers in 2009 who referred to the precedent of the 2008 strike and they followed the same techniques and rhetoric: the strikers as a 'trouble making minority', the trade unions as 'fanaticising the workers', a huge banner claiming that 'the shop is functioning normally', asking from the non-striking workers to be photographed with banners supporting their management and wanting to protect their jobs. Both the employers and the strikers were engaged in a battle for publicity. The Employers and Industrialists Association and the Chamber of Commerce backed the firm, while the trade unions backed the strikers with announcements.<sup>258</sup> At the local level, the firm's management increased its advertisements in its attempt to impose its view that the 'shop operates normally' while trade unionists and activists (including

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<sup>258</sup> In 2008 PEO and SEK were together while in 2009 it was PEO alone that led the strike. ETYK also announced support for the strikers in 2009.

myself) campaigned against the firm.<sup>259</sup> The strikers, on the other hand, tried to employ all the means of protest available in an attempt to maintain and boost their morale as well as undermine the morale of the strike breakers. In 2008, for example, the strikers (primarily young Cypriot women) shouted modified football fans' slogans to the managers and strike breakers exchanging the phrase 'winning this championship' with the phrase 'winning this right'<sup>260</sup> while in 2009 the strikers mobilised an AKEL youth band to beat the drums outside a non-striking restaurant of the chain in a busy commercial avenue.<sup>261</sup>

#### 6.4.2. Precarious subjectivities

The current global economic crisis is affecting the Cypriot labour market at the time of writing with rising unemployment,<sup>262</sup> governmental aid to the 'tourism and construction sectors' and delaying the renegotiation of sectoral collective agreements in the hotels and restaurants. '*Be quiet, there is a crisis*' was the response of a professional trade unionist, according to one workplace committee trade union member who reminded him of the need for renegotiation and renewal of the sectoral collective agreement during late 2009. Amidst right-wing calls of the need to contain immigration and amidst left-wing calls to abolish undeclared labour and amidst joint rhetorical calls for the prioritisation of Cypriots in employment practices and preventing major job losses (meaning for the Greek Cypriots), precarity as a real social condition is being reproduced. In a monetarised society like south Cyprus, precarity affects primarily the stratum of the 'low-waged', the 'working poor' or the 'vulnerable workers' but it extends beyond them into other working class strata, both skilled as well as unskilled. In the last analysis precarity is a structural phenomenon associated with the most fundamental power of the employer: the power to hire and fire. Employer terrorism, however, which instills 'the fear of being fired' is at certain moments in time overcome, opening up to spaces of precarious freedom in the context and duration of collective struggle. Although labour market flexibility, as capital's strategy, implies and presupposes labour mobility, moving from one job to another has also in certain times a liberating dimension. The reclaiming or reconquest of labour mobility, however, presupposes particular forms of exploitation by specific employers (especially lower wages, authoritarian management, poor

<sup>259</sup> In the 2008 strike the left-wing radio station Astra, however, put the trade unions' announcements immediately after the firm's advertisements. There was also an internet petition circulating at the time.

<sup>260</sup> Retail trade strike in 2008.

<sup>261</sup> According to the leading striker who arranged this, he was inspired from AKEL's celebration of May Day with the youth parade.

<sup>262</sup> Politis, 20-3-2010. Registered unemployment increased from 3.7% in 2008 to 5.3% in 2009 (last quarters).

workplace welfare) and most importantly the aid of familial and communal networks of solidarity.

Precarious subjectivities are constructed on the coordinates of fear and on the trajectory of freedom. That might explain the unpredictability of labour militancy, or at least the unpredictability of its magnitude until the last minute. Challenging the power of one's employer presupposes being ready to take risks, including the risk not only to be fired but also to have difficulties in finding another job as *'employers talk amongst themselves and do not want trouble makers'*.<sup>263</sup> In the hotel of case study 1 there was unrest in the kitchen in 2005 and it spread to the housekeeping department, yet the strike ended the same day with minor wage increases. In the construction site of case study 6 there was unrest amongst the Romanian iron workers, who staged a spontaneous work stoppage demanding wage increases, yet again the strike ended the same day, again with a compromise and minor wage increases. If the employer side shows a willingness to compromise from the beginning, the strike is bound to be short-lived, whereas if the employer takes a firm intransigent stance it is bound to last longer.

Freedom from and of precarity does not always take the form of a frontal collision with the employer through strike activity. It might also take the form of escape from one employer, abandoning him during peak work time and looking elsewhere for employment. Quitting a job can be a liberating action in certain moments as well as indirectly challenging the power of the employer through the refusal to offer one's labour power. The example of the four Polish students in case study 2 mentioned above is illustrative. They came to work in the hotel chain but soon found that the wage was too low and the working conditions too bad and the working time too long and started looking for another employer. One went back to Poland, while the others looked for another job in the area. When they did, they just abandoned their employer, who tried to avoid paying them fully their wages. Eventually they got some more money after the intervention of PEO. When I talked to them again one month later they said they were happy with their new employer as well as with their new managers. Labour turnover, or the frequent change of employer, is not something that should be approached absolutely or one-dimensionally. To be sure at a structural level, high labour turnover boosts the employers' authority over the workforce. Yet at the same time the employer pays the cost of worker adaptation and training in the form of initially low productivity. From a precarious worker perspective however, the new start is often refreshing and promising while the experience of work life is carried from one workplace to

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<sup>263</sup> Case study 1, barman. Mentioned also by many workers in other hospitality and construction case studies.

another. This circulation of experience, both technical as well as social, is instrumental in the construction and re-construction of class subjectivity and consciousness.

Those directly subjected to the condition of precarity have no other choice but to actively involve themselves into their broader social networks, so as to share the burdens of an unstable work-life. Help in job searching, provision of small loans, accommodation, psychological support are specific things needed by precarious workers and obtained through their participation in broader social networks. The family in the case of the Cypriots and the ethnic community are the main institutions through which solidarity is being practiced. To be sure there are cases of solidarity which arise out of immediate social relations, amongst friends and neighbours, through social references and through collegial solidarity. The formation of social networks is ultimately a complex issue, not restricted to the realm of work and certainly beyond the scope of this study. However, it is clear that the condition of precarity is not only undermining worker collectivism through the individualist employment arrangements but at the same time exacerbating the need and thus the tendency for more collectivist approaches and perspectives amongst the workers in their attempt to simply get by.

Those indirectly subjected to the condition of precarity, facing and sensing in other words its potentiality, entertain petty-bourgeois dreams of opening up businesses, becoming self employed, even employing other people to get out of the salaried class and become the boss of themselves. Some workers had done this in their past work life,<sup>264</sup> some were also doing it then<sup>265</sup> and some wanted to do it in their future work life.<sup>266</sup> Some are tempted by the higher income of the self-employed, some others, on the other hand, want to avoid the risk and time drain that goes by one owning one's own business. In the absence of capital, becoming self employed is both liberating and suffocating at the same time. One might enjoy the freedom of not having a manager on top of one, yet at the same time one is subjected to the ups and downs of the markets, the pressure from the banks, creating a condition of anxiety and not necessarily escaping from the condition of precarity.

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<sup>264</sup> Case study 2, Restaurants manager. Case study 7, general worker.

<sup>265</sup> Case study 3, barman. Case study 7, builder.

<sup>266</sup> Case study 2, store keeper. Case study 3, barman.



## 6.5. Class beyond ethnicity

In the process of ending this chapter and before moving to the next, it is important to say a few more words on a significant aspect that I have already commented upon on various occasions but have not focused explicitly enough. This becomes necessary at this stage, at the end of the analysis concerning labour relations south of the green line that is, and before turning my attention to the north of the green line of this ethnically and territorially divided island.

The impact of the relatively huge influx of immigrant labour since the 1990s and EU workers after 2004 on the class structure in Cyprus cannot be overestimated. A substantial proportion of the working class in Cyprus today is non-Cypriot and as I already mentioned in certain sectors and especially in manual and less skilled labour non-Cypriots constitute the majority. This not only accounts to some extent for the decline of trade unionism in Cyprus but also for the decline of the class and class war discourse more generally in the public sphere. Generally speaking immigrant workers are either ignored as if they are invisible and excluded not only from the political processes of Cypriot society but also from the political discourses of the public sphere, or seen primarily in cultural terms – by liberals as the factor which makes multiculturalism necessary and by nationalists as the internal threat to Greek Cypriot identity. Although it is more or less a known fact that immigrants are low paid workers and largely exploited economically by their employers, they are usually seen in the best case merely as passive victims of objective circumstances rather than active agents in a dynamic social reality.

Left wingers and trade unionists, for example, might sympathise with immigrants, condemn their exploitation and oppression and support their human and labour rights and even talk about the need for equal treatment of Cypriots and non-Cypriots at work but this rarely derives from a working class point of view. The plight of the immigrant workers is more often seen as a threat for the Cypriot workers and defending immigrant worker rights is usually seen and articulated as an advanced line of defense of the Cypriot worker rights. This might be unavoidable to a certain extent as it may make more sense to the Cypriot workers and to be sure is the positive reaction to the objective social condition of cheap immigrant labour, the negative being the demand for immigrants to leave. Nevertheless it also signifies the strength of native ethnic communalism that shapes the field of labour as well and delegates class to a secondary role vis-à-vis ethnicity. Immigrant workers are seen first as immigrants and then as fellow

workers. And class solidarity where present – and this is far from the norm – is rarely indifferent and irrespective to ethnicity, but more often on top of and despite it.<sup>267</sup>

There are two main factors for the inability of the articulation of a class discourse and a class oriented political and social action beyond ethnicity. The first is historical and has its roots in the ethnic division and conflict of the 1950s and 1960s whose legacy is still present today. The division of the Cypriot working class along ethnic lines has essentially not only allowed and facilitated the division of the country itself but has also established the hegemony of ethnicity vis-à-vis notions of class. National – that is in the Cypriot context ethnic communal unity – became an ultimate priority imposing limits to alternative and counter discourses centred upon class with their potentially subversive implications. The second factor is more recent and social and concerns the relatively late influx of immigration in Cyprus. It was only in the late 1980s that Cyprus changed from a net exporter to a net importer of labour and it is essentially only in the late 2000s that the first 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants have appeared.<sup>268</sup> Furthermore, because of the guest worker migration model in force in Cyprus, whereby immigrant flow rather than immigrant settlement is the norm, most non-Cypriots are temporary residents in the island and are seen so by most Cypriots. The resultant limited integration of immigrants in the Cypriot society is thus both cause and consequence in the vicious circle that puts them apart from lower class Cypriot workers even when they share similar or analogous working conditions.

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<sup>267</sup> There are exceptions to this, such as for example the 2009 strike referred to above which was multi-ethnic and with the ethnic background of the workers playing no role and having no significance in its development.

<sup>268</sup> These are primarily the children of the Pontians that have arrived in the 1990s and are just beginning to enter the labour market.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: A note on labour relations and the working class north of the green line and some preliminary comparisons with the south**

So far I have been talking about Cyprus essentially referring primarily to the Greek Cypriot community and post 1974 to the southern part, the area that is controlled by the Republic of Cyprus. However, I cannot end this thesis which has 'Cyprus' in its title and as the spatial and temporal context of the research project without talking also about the northern part of the island, the area under the control of the Turkish army constituting the illegal / not recognised state called TRNC. Ignoring the northern part, as the overwhelming majority of Greek Cypriot researchers does, would be both politically and scientifically problematic. Personally, as a Cypriot peace and re-unification activist since my teenage years, I consider Cyprus as a 'whole' (Kizilyurek, 1990) and refuse to accept explicitly or implicitly the logic of its division. And I believe that social scientists and researchers north and south should find the courage to collaborate and autonomise themselves from the hegemonic discourses in their communities and refrain from playing an auxiliary intellectual role to the reproduction of the conflict of their respective communal power regimes.

Nevertheless the division of the country is a reality and the separate development of the two communities, especially post 1974, has created essentially two significantly different societies in the island. This is the ontological reason why I am dealing with labour relations and the working class in the Turkish Cypriot society / state in a separate chapter. And from an epistemological perspective my insufficient knowledge of the Turkish language and the Turkish Cypriot culture requires me to keep this chapter shorter in size and broader in scope, based as it is on secondary sources, including some texts translated from Turkish, some interviews and my broader experience and information gained in my interactions with Turkish Cypriot trade unionists and activists in the context of the bi-communal peace and re-unification movement.

### **7.1. The unique and exceptional state of north Cyprus**

North Cyprus is essentially at the heart of the 'state of exception', the term that has been used to describe the multiple regimes of constitutional and political order in the territory of the island as a result of the legacy of the colonial past and the on-going ethnic conflict and division (Constantinou,

2008, Trimikliniotis, 2010).<sup>269</sup> The exceptional state in the northern Turkish Cypriot society brings about a structurally determined duality at the level of society and thus also the working class. In the last decade, following up the opening of the checkpoints in 2003 and the relative improvement in the climate concerning bi-communal relations in conjunction with the expansion of immigration from Turkey and the entry of Cyprus as a whole in the EU, the segmentation of the northern society into two categories – the Turkish Cypriots and the Turks living in Cyprus, has come to be more pronounced. Since the TRNC's citizenship papers are not formally recognised outside its territory, the division between natives and foreigners is much less clear than in the south between citizens and non-citizens. There are those whom the Republic of Cyprus recognises as Turkish Cypriots and gives them passports and allows them to cross to the south to work and settle, and there are those that it does not, even if they have TRNC citizenship.

#### 7.1.1. Historical and political context

After the separation of the two communities in Cyprus achieved a territorial dimension as well, as a consequence of the nationalist violence of 1958 and especially during 1963-1967, the die of partition had already been cast. There were of course prospects for a peaceful solution prior to 1974 in the context of the negotiations that had started in 1968 after the proclamation by Makarios of the policy of 'the possible', that is independence, rather than 'the desirable', that is enosis. Yet the negotiations collapsed amidst the terrorist violence of the enosis front spearheaded by EOKA B paving the way for the coup d'etat by the military regime of Greece which was immediately followed up by the invasion of the Turkish army and the forced partition of the island into a Turkish Cypriot north and a Greek Cypriot south through population displacement in 1974 and population exchange in 1975.

The war of 1974 did not lead to mass unemployment and did not proletarianise the Turkish Cypriot masses, as it did with the Greek Cypriot masses. In fact quite the opposite: many Turkish Cypriots were given Greek Cypriot farm land under a system of points (Erdal, 2011), while a lot of jobs were created in the public sector, which expanded immensely in the attempt to control and administer the

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<sup>269</sup> Whether this multiplicity of (dis-)orders (Republic of Cyprus, TRNC, buffer zone, British bases) is seen as balancing out and legitimising post facto each other, making up a relatively stable and/since de facto accepted by individuals 'Cypriot rule' (Constantinou, 2008) or whether it is seen as inherently in disequilibrium and thus potentially unstable, with the presence and absence of social conflict determining its existence and shape (Trimikliniotis, 2010) has no direct relevance to the argument here which focuses on its implications rather than the phenomenon itself.

comparatively to the population huge territory that came under the disposal of the Turkish Cypriot elite as a consequence of the war. Despite the desire of the right wing political elite around Rauf Denktas to boost the private sector and establish an independent modern market capitalist economy, this proved difficult as the exceptional circumstances forced the state into assuming a disproportionately big role in the emerging separate northern economy. It was primarily state subsidised agriculture and secondarily state owned and controlled manufacturing that constituted the primary economic activity of the north in late 1970s and 1980s (Strong, 1999). Furthermore, the distribution of the war spoils along political clientalistic lines created real and perceived injustices (Strong, 1999, Erdal 2011), while the economic difficulties as a result of the heavy dependence on Turkey, itself undergoing structural adjustment in the early 1980s, led to increased industrial conflict in the north, in stark contrast to the south where the notion of ‘national/communal unity’ in the face of the Turkish threat had prevailed (Strong, 1999).

The official proclamation of the separate state of TRNC in 1983 and the course of deepening and legitimising the de facto partition of the island taken by the Denktas regime had adverse political and economic repercussions on the north. Further international diplomatic isolation and economic barriers to trade were erected especially after the 1994 European Court of Justice decision effectively preventing the import into the European Community of goods accompanied by commercial documents issued by the Turkish Cypriot authorities (Tocci, 2004). This essentially increased even more the dependence of the north on Turkey, while the resurgence of nationalism in the Greek Cypriot community after the 1993 election of Clerides to the presidency led to the deterioration of bi-communal relations and the build up of militaristic tension in Cyprus and also between Greece and Turkey, culminating in the Imia incident in the Aegean and the Derinia incident in Cyprus in early and mid 1996.<sup>270</sup> The negative implications of this dependence on Turkey began to be felt in the beginning of the 2000s provoking essentially the first Turkish Cypriot ‘revolt’ in 2002-2003, while things had only become worse by the 2010s with the second Turkish Cypriot ‘revolt’ underway at the time of writing.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> The danger of a Greco-Turkish war as a result of media sponsored nationalist hysteria had been a real possibility then, eventually averted through international diplomacy. It was a significant shock though for the people of Greece, Turkey and Cyprus and can be seen as providing the rationale (of averting a similar crisis in the future) for the rapprochement process between the governments of Greece and Turkey which started a few years later. The bankruptcy of the policy of nationalist tension was made evident also in Cyprus which by 1999 led the two leaderships into the negotiating table. The nationalist climax of 1996 served also as a rallying point for extreme right wing political formations in both Greece and the Greek Cypriot community who begun claiming from then on new heroes – martyrs using the victims of the incidents for their own anti-Turkish political purposes.

<sup>271</sup> The term ‘revolt’ does not refer to riots here, but is used because of two factors – the mass character of the mobilisations

The 2011 mobilisations have similarities with but also differences from those in 2002-2003. It is of course too early and beyond this thesis to analyse, compare and contrast the two revolts – nevertheless, because the trade unions had and have the leading role in them, embarking upon general strikes as well as mass rallies, it is appropriate to note them down, both as instances of direct challenge to the unique and exceptional state of north Cyprus. The success of the trade unions in massively mobilising workers on a series of economic as well as political demands is on its own a significant fact, raising theoretical questions about the links between the economic and the political and empirical ones concerning the transformation of discontent into protest. And to be sure there are not only sociological implications here, but also political and activist ones. Although in both cases opposition to austerity measures served as a spark, soon giving way to notions of communal autonomy as the only solution to the difficulties faced, the more general context is significantly different. In 2002 – 2003 the Annan Plan and the prospect of a united Cyprus<sup>272</sup> entering the EU in 2004, as Bozkurt (2011) says, ‘*constituted a promising alternative for a new, concrete social project to replace the defunct politico-economic structure*’. In 2011 there is less hope and naivety, more existentialism amidst cynicism and widespread despair.

#### 7.1.2. Economy and society:

By the 1990s and 2000s agricultural production and manufacturing had declined in the north as the economy became fully oriented towards services. Tourism and private tertiary education became the

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sustained for at least two years and their political impact, to be sure indirect and muted, nevertheless significant in shifting the political balances and to some extent the contours of the system. The first ‘betrayed revolt’ against the nationalist Denktas’ regime (Demetriou and Vlachos, 2007) saw in AKP’s new government in Turkey an ally and, in the person of Erdogan, a reformer against the nationalist-military establishment, that was going to allow peace and reunification in Cyprus. The second revolt that has begun in 2011, is however also directed against AKP’s government in Turkey, which is now accused of Islamic neoliberalism and colonialism.

<sup>272</sup> The Annan Plan came at, and as a result of, a critical geo-political juncture at which a series of international actors and processes converged making the reunification of Cyprus possible (Pericleous, 2007). It is ultimately sad, to say the least, to admit that the reunification prospect has been defeated at the local level. 2004 stands out as a key moment in a long history, a peak and a climax in the political and diplomatic history of the Cyprus problem (Iraklides, 2006; Pericleous 2007). The Greek Cypriot society underwent though a major and significant political split between the support for the hard No and the hard Yes in the referendum of 2004. The uneasy official AKELian “soft No” compromise stance (which has been rewarded in 2008 and is now hegemonic) simply hides and glosses over a much more serious and deeper division beyond the “Yes” and the “No” neither of which, and more so the latter, was homogeneous. As Hadjidemetriou claims (2008 p. 107) the real division in Cyprus is between those who support a solution and reunification and those who support division and partition.

primary vehicles of economic development and main sources of income for the northern Cypriot economy. Nevertheless the inability to have direct flights to north Cyprus as a consequence of the abnormal political situation, illegality or isolation in the two respective discourses, set definite limits to economic expansion and growth. Nevertheless, the economic aid and increasing investment from Turkey, on the one hand, and the process of Cyprus' EU accession and the prospect of reunification, on the other, which attracted foreign investment on immovable properties and sustained a construction boom all over the island from the beginning of the 2000s, until the onset of the global crisis in 2008, allowed the northern economy to grow and significant sections of the Turkish Cypriot society to prosper.<sup>273</sup>

The deepening economic dependency on Turkey as a result of the use of the Turkish currency since the 1970s and the nearly total lack of access to regional and international markets exposed northern Cyprus to the economic crises of Turkey with a multiplier effect (Erdal, 2011 p. 210). Erdal (2011) talks about a non properly functioning economy in northern Cyprus, which is in reality three different parallel economies inter-penetrating one another – a civil servant economy, a military economy and an underground one.<sup>274</sup> The bloated out of proportion civil service along with the progressive and generous social insurance and pensions associated with it – although these benefits have been decreasing steadily over the last years, entirely cut for the new recruits with the new austerity measures threatening now older employees as well – gives rise to conceptions of the Turkish Cypriots who primarily staff the TRNC civil service as a collective petty bourgeois community which benefits from Greek Cypriot land and Turkish immigrant labour. Although there is some empirical relevance in these conceptions, as Trimikliniotis (2011) points out, they are both theoretically and politically problematic as they fail to grasp the complex dynamics of the class structure in the north and the ambiguous relationship of the Turkish Cypriots with their state as well as with Turkey.

The terms of this dependency of the Turkish Cypriots on Turkey have become not only more stark in the last two decades but also more structural. In fact all three economies mentioned by Erdal above are

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<sup>273</sup> The construction boom was possible because of the relatively low prices of real estate in Cyprus. In the north most real estate prices were much lower as development was primarily on Greek Cypriot property and thus legally questionable and investment wise precarious.

<sup>274</sup> The separate military economy is analogous and in continuum with the one in Turkey. The underground one is to be sure a global phenomenon existing in south Cyprus as well – however, due to the small size of north Cyprus and the lack of international legal oversight this is disproportional. The closing of casinos in Turkey since 1997 and the absence of any casinos in the south has effectively contributed to north Cyprus becoming a gambling haven.

more or less under Turkish control as the key positions in both the administration and the market and the decision making power rests firmly in the hands of the Turkish state and its agents. The expansion of the flow of Turkish capital and labour into north Cyprus has been instrumental in this process. As Faiz (2008) says, there is an expansionist effect in the relation between Turkey and north Cyprus that renders the *'front benchers of northern Cyprus' capital* *'not solely a collaborator comprador class'* but *'organic actors within the process'*. The private sector in north Cyprus today, (banks, hotels, constructions, supermarkets etc) is overwhelmingly dominated by Turkish corporations and employing primarily Turkish immigrant workers who are non unionised and often undocumented and unprotected.

## 7.2. Labour conditions

The labour force in the north is ultimately much more rigidly segmented than the one in the south. There is greater distance between the public and the private sector workers in terms of wages and benefits as the public and private sector distinction roughly coincides with the unionised and non-unionised labour segments – which in its turn again roughly coincides with the Turkish Cypriot and Turkish distinction. This obvious first sight observation is what gives rise to the sort of generalisations mentioned above about a petty bourgeois Turkish Cypriot community collectively benefiting from the state of exception and immigrant labour. Reality however is much more complex than this as segmentations are multiple while the general situation is for many people difficult and harsh as there is high unemployment, underemployment and informal work.

Working conditions and living standards in north Cyprus are worse than south Cyprus but much better than Turkey. The size of the minimum wage is indicative of this – in north Cyprus this lies at 1300 YTL gross monthly, (650 euros) significantly lower to that in the south (850 euros) when one takes in to account the fact that prices are now more or less the same north and south, – and above the minimum wage in Turkey which is around 600 YTL (300 euros) gross monthly. This variation in terms of wage rates between north and south Cyprus on the one hand and Turkey and north Cyprus on the other both facilitates and explains the movement of labour and its magnitude across the borders. There has also been and still is a significant emigration movement of Turkish Cypriots to European countries and especially the UK as a result of the refusal of Turkish Cypriot youth to accept the available low paid jobs or a life in a seemingly 'permanently' exceptional and problematic state.



### 7.2.1. Turkish Cypriot and immigrant workers

*‘It is logical that a country's economy might need immigrants. It is not logical when the number of immigrants exceeds the local population’<sup>275</sup>.*

The issue of the immigrant population in the north, or the settlers as the discourse in the south has it, is a very important one not only for the social and economic structures and processes of the Turkish Cypriot or Turkish speaking community of north Cyprus but also for the on-going Cyprus problem and the negotiations about it. It is a very sensitive and contested issue with broader political and geo-political implications, and neither empirical observation nor theoretical evaluation or political positioning is innocent or easy. Precisely because the immigration flow from Turkey to northern Cyprus has been and arguably is still promoted, encouraged or at least facilitated by the Turkish state and the state form of the north, it would be problematic to accept at face value the official data about it which under-estimate the actual numbers. On the other hand, unofficial estimates and evaluations are often exaggerated, purposely or accidentally is irrelevant here – in the attempt to alarm, alert and sensitise the Cypriots on both sides of the dividing line, not always for the same purposes.

With regards to the estimation of the actual numbers, methodologies vary from census and electoral participation data to arrivals and departures to the number of registered cars and mobile phones or even more recently to the number of bread loafs produced on a daily basis. With regards to the meaning, significance and implications of the subject matter, the substantive positions of researchers and political agents again vary in their focus and emphasis from the themes of the demographic threat faced by the indigenous population to the racism, discrimination and violation of the human rights of the immigrants to the erosion of Turkish Cypriot cultural identity and the violation of their political will to notions of a state policy of colonisation as a barrier to peace and the reunification of the island.<sup>276</sup> For the purposes of this study the most significant dimension is the multiple segmentation of the labour market and process in the north as a consequence of the different regimes of labour power utilisation and correspondingly of the working class in the northern part of Cyprus.

<sup>275</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-İŞ. Interview in April 2011. This view is shared by most trade unions and political forces in the Turkish Cypriot community.

<sup>276</sup> The debate amongst three Turkish Cypriot researchers aligned to three different perspectives and political positions is illuminating here (BILBAN-İKME, 2008).

According to the TRNC statistics (2007, p. 143) there are 24 943 trade union members in the north. This is essentially around 15% of the total labour force and 99% of trade union members are employed in the public and semi-public sector.<sup>277</sup> In the broader public sector there is the distinction between the civil servants proper, that is those who are employed directly by the state on the basis of a negotiated protocol and under specific laws, excluded from the social security system and paid directly by the state treasury, and those who are employed in public services on the basis of negotiated enterprise level collective agreements and in the context of the social security system.<sup>278</sup> In the private sector there are a few workplaces where there is trade union presence and enterprise level collective agreements in sectors such as printing, cement making, alcohol and pharmaceutical production as well as some banks. Trade unions in the north are also split on ideological and political grounds and compete amongst themselves for membership, allegiance and influence.<sup>279</sup> Once they manage to get a foothold in a workplace by enlisting some members, a referendum is conducted and the trade union that manages to get the majority wins the total representation of that enterprise and collects the trade union contributions from all the unionised employees.<sup>280</sup>

As far as gender is concerned the situation is more or less analogous to the southern part of Cyprus. Women are in other words proportionally fewer than men in terms of participation in the labour market, under-represented in managerial and employer positions and concentrated in specific sectors and occupations such as administrative and office work, sales and services etc. The rate of participation in the labour market is higher amongst younger women and women of Turkish Cypriot origin, while housework and child care remains primarily a burden on women (Lisaniler, 2003). Although formally speaking there is no legal or institutional discrimination on the basis of gender,<sup>281</sup> as a result of occupational segregation there is some difference in terms of income with more women found near the

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<sup>277</sup> Arslan Bicakli, General Secretary of TURK-SEN. Interview in April 2011.

<sup>278</sup> Arslan Bicakli, General Secretary of TURK-SEN. Interview in April 2011. This is analogous with the public sector in the south.

<sup>279</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-IŞ. Interview in April 2011. HUR-IŞ, the federation of independent labour unions which is a nationalist right-wing union and the primary competitor of DEV-IŞ, was characterised as a (yellow) union that is ‘under the influence of the employers’.

<sup>280</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-IŞ. Interview in April 2011. ‘Not all those who pay trade union subscriptions are necessarily members of DEV-IŞ. In order for one to be a member of DEV-IŞ, he/she has to accept its constitution, its communist ideology and its position for a federal reunification of Cyprus. There are workers who pay the trade union subscription in order to be covered by the collective agreement and receive the corresponding benefits but might not share the politics of the trade union and thus abstain from its internal procedures and political mobilisations’.

<sup>281</sup> Interviews with DEV-IŞ and TURK-SEN trade union leaders.

minimum wage rate and in the bottom of the income hierarchy (Lisaniler, 2003 p. 63-65). Differences on the basis of gender are more clear in the private than the public sector,<sup>282</sup> although what is more striking in the private sector is the breadth and depth of exploitation which is common to both genders.<sup>283</sup> Like in the southern part, there are many women that are trade union members (in DEV-IŞ and TURK-SEN women constitute around 40%), nevertheless, despite some exceptions, they are essentially under-represented in leadership positions. The house work burden has been claimed as the key reason for this; as a trade union leader admitted '*we men do not create the objective conditions for women to be able to achieve equality*'.<sup>284</sup>

Turkish immigrant workers in the north, who now constitute the majority of the population, have arrived in at least three different waves, each wave driven by a different rationale, bringing different sorts of immigrants and with different implications. Kurtuluş and Purkis (2008) suggest a typology which sees the first wave, immediately after the 1974 war, as simultaneously political and economic with landless Turkish farmers pushed and pulled to north Cyprus by incentives given by the Turkish state in the form of free use of Greek Cypriot property. The second wave in the 1980s and early 1990s is seen as more economic and opportunist in nature seeking easy profit making through trade and petty trade, more organised in form, based on migration networks and a consequence of the particular conjuncture of the neo-liberal opening of the Turkish economy. The third wave, from the late 1990s onwards, is seen as wholly independent from state policies and relations between Turkey and north Cyprus and constituting essentially part of the global movement of cheap informal labour which follows the flows of capital and has as its destination areas with capital concentration, in this case a consequence of the heavy investments of Turkish capital in north Cyprus (Kurtuluş-Purkis, 2008 p. 65-68).

There is some degree of integration between Turkish Cypriots and Turks in north Cyprus, made possible through long co-existence, epitomised in naturalisations and mixed marriages and promoted by traditionally hegemonic nationalist discourses of non discrimination among 'mainland and island Turks'.<sup>285</sup> This however has to be qualified as really there are – leaving aside soldiers and students,

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<sup>282</sup> Arslan Bicakli, General Secretary of TURK-SEN. Interview in April 2011.

<sup>283</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-IŞ. Interview in April 2011.

<sup>284</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-IŞ. Interview in April 2011.

<sup>285</sup> The most characteristic was Rauf Denktaş' famous comment in the 1980s regarding Turkish Cypriot emigration abroad and Turkish immigration to northern Cyprus - 'Turk goes, Turk comes'. (Faiz, 2008, p. 180)

businessmen and bureaucrats – three categories of Turkish workers in north Cyprus: the TRNC citizens, the registered workers and the undeclared workers, corresponding to different levels of connection with the (northern Cypriot) state and society and usually different incomes and conditions of employment. Long term residents in Cyprus and especially those with TRNC citizenship are not facing discrimination in the north and have more or less gained equal status with Turkish Cypriots in the labour market, often employed in the public sector themselves and belonging to trade unions.<sup>286</sup> Immigrants of the last wave, which is also the biggest in terms of size, are divided into the registered and the non registered ones. These workers are temporary and come and go according to the ups and downs of the labour market as the border between Turkey and north Cyprus is effectively an open one.

In 2004-2005 the left of centre CTP led government coalition proceeded to register these workers so that they could be formally included into the social security system as well as allow the authorities to gain some control over the labour market. The attempt however was only partially successful in its goal, as only a proportion of the immigrant workers was actually registered, while according to some people it backfired in terms of its implications as registration opened up the way for further immigration as the dependents of the registered immigrants began to arrive while many of the registered workers became candidates for TRNC citizenship. As far as wages are concerned, the 40 000 registered workers with yearly, but usually automatically renewed, work permits are formally paid around the minimum wage but in fact they are made to work longer hours for this.<sup>287</sup> In the words of Kurtuluş and Purkis (2008) *‘To work with a work permit, according to an informal worker, does not stop the informal character of labour. Because, even those with a work permit, are employed 10-12 hours per day, in conditions that are not conforming to health and safety rules, does not receive extra wage for overtime work and does not have holidays. Laws do not prohibit the informality of labour; on the contrary they make it even cheaper’*. The high rate of mobility from one employer to the other as well as the ease of entry and exit from the country keep the price of labour cheap and allow the exploitation of informal labour in legal, semi-legal as well as illegal ways.

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<sup>286</sup> They do not have any rights in the southern part though and are not even allowed to cross the border. Their future is part of the negotiation process and it is expected that at least 50 000 will receive citizenship rights in the United Federal Cyprus, once it is agreed upon.

<sup>287</sup> If they work normal hours their wages are around 800-1000 YTL and can only rise above the minimum wage (1300 YTL) with over-time work. Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-İŞ. Interview in April 2011. Also Kurtuluş-Purkis, 2008

### 7.2.2. The informal economy and super-exploitation

The informal economy in the north is similar to the one operating in the south both in terms of its overwhelmingly immigrant composition and in terms of its super-exploitative conditions of work and life. The extended family and the village community of origin serve as the basic social institutions organising both job allocation and household coexistence and offering immediate welfare and survival nets in a highly precarious work-life. The employer, usually a construction contractor, brings his workers directly from Turkey and keeps their identity cards, while he is usually also the home provider of the workers who are crowded in bad accommodation in the old town of Nicosia within the Venetian walls, which has been deserted by the Turkish Cypriots since the late 1970s. The fact that accommodation is usually bad does not mean that it is cheap – in fact a substantial proportion of the wage goes for the rent (Kurtuluş-Purkis, 2008).

Some are originally registered but then stay around after their work permit expires, some are unregistered from the beginning. And of course there are many instances of delayed payment and even unpaid work. Undeclared workers are often threatened by their employers with deportation when they demand their rights or even their wages. In cases when some of them are deported, they are even made to pay for their ticket back, ending up in Turkey with no money (Kurtuluş-Purkis, 2008). Another similarity with informal work north and south is the level of *de facto* toleration of the phenomenon through unwillingness and incapability to control it despite official rhetoric. Although authorities admit that there is a serious problem of social cohesion, human rights violation and even public health with the often appalling work-life conditions of super-exploitation that characterise the informal economy they are simply unable to address this. The high mobility of workers, on the one hand, and the inefficiency of the state mechanism to inspect the workplaces, on the other hand, renders it difficult to prevent the abuse of labour in a way that is often akin to slavery.

What is different with the south is the relative size of the informal economy and the unregistered immigrant workers. It is estimated that there are 40 000 undeclared workers in the north, a number that is considered too big in proportion to the total population of the north, estimated as being between 250 000 and 300 000. Although informal labour in north Cyprus is not as big as in developing countries, it is acknowledged as being economically significant, constituting already in the beginning of the 2000

decade, (and before the 2002-2007 construction boom, which was accompanied by an expanded influx of informal immigrant labour) 35-40% of the total labour force and accounting for 12-17% of the GNP (Besim-Jenkins, 2006). The unique and exceptional state of TRNC and the fact that most informal immigrants are from Turkey effectively insulates the northern Cypriot society from any international pressure that might have induced the authorities into a practice more sensitive to human and labour rights, while the condition of a blanket and *a priori* 'illegality' of Turkish immigration amidst the ongoing Cyprus problem essentially complicates and reinforces the existing social status quo.

### 7.3. Trade unions and politics

There are significant differences between trade unions in the north and trade unions in the south. Size constitutes the first and obvious one and this cannot be explained in terms of the difference in the population size of the two areas or even the two communities. In 2007 official statistics counted 24 943 trade union members in the north and 208 206 trade union members in the south with density levels at 15% and 54% correspondingly. The difference is even bigger if one compares trade unions in sectors where unionisation is partial – on the left PEO has 81 500 members while its partner in the north DEV-İŞ has only 1 300 (although receiving subscriptions from 2 000); while on the right, SEK has around 65 000 members while its partner in the north TURK-SEN has only 4 500.<sup>288</sup>

The factor which explains this discrepancy in numbers and trade union density is the almost total incapability of the Turkish Cypriot trade unions to penetrate the private sector. As mentioned above, the overwhelming majority of workers in the private sector especially beyond the family business level are Turkish immigrants, most of them temporary and many of them working informally. In hotels and construction, the sectors studied in the south, this is most pronounced. Trade unionists, both left and right, insist that they try their best to recruit Turkish workers and that their failure can be reduced simply and starkly to fierce employer resistance, which even can be said to resemble terrorism. As soon as trade unionists make their contacts and enter a workplace to recruit workers, immediately the boss fires the workplace leaders and threatens to fire the rest, most of which end up in the end resigning.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> The data are the most recent and official ones at the time of writing. For the PEO and SEK (<http://www.worker-participation.eu/National-Industrial-Relations/Countries/Cyprus/Trade-Union>) while for DEV-İŞ and TURK-SEN interviews taken with their general secretaries in April 2011.

<sup>289</sup> Interviews with DEV-İŞ and TURK-SEN trade union leaders.

### 7.3.1. Upholding living and working standards

The other fundamental difference between trade unions in the north and trade unions in the south is in terms of their relation to the political process in general and the political parties and the state in particular. Trade unions in the south are fairly integrated to the state and are stake holders in the context of the tripartite system, as I argued in chapters four and six, and this applies both for the right as well as for the left. Moreover, the links between the trade unions and their corresponding political parties are fairly strong and able to survive despite some occasional disagreements on certain issues of social policy. In the north trade unions are much more autonomous both from the political parties and from the state in general. Even the trade unions which are affiliated to specific political parties do not hesitate to clash with them, sometimes quite openly and intensely. DEV-IŞ, for example, refused to follow the drift of CTP to the right after the collapse of the USSR and openly expressed its opposition to its participation in a coalition government in 1994, while in 2004, when CTP became the leading governmental party, it broke its organic link with it. Similarly on the right, KAMU-SEN did not hesitate to publicly confront UBP's recent economic policies. Trade unions in the north are often vehicles of popular mobilisations and trade union leaders are political agents outside the state and some of them frequently against it.

It is not a coincidence that trade unions in the north have effectively led the mass rallies of the Turkish Cypriot community both in 2002-2003 as well as in early 2011. The absence of a developed and elaborate tripartite system as a consequence of the trade union powerlessness in the private sector, on the one hand, and the more general exceptional political condition of the TRNC, on the other hand, precludes the trade unions from assuming a consistent social partnership role and acting as stake holders and forces of integration in the system. Since negotiation is usually blocked and mediation often impossible, trade unions resort to a more confrontational role, acting as an agency of expression of popular discontent. As the general secretary of DEV-IŞ put it: '*Social dialogue does not really exist, they do not listen to the trade unions; the state and the employers do what they want, so we boycott the meetings*'.<sup>290</sup> In the last years, as a result of the global crisis, on the one hand, and the growing determination of the AKP government in Turkey to impose its will and socio-economic policy in north Cyprus, on the other, a resistance movement grew, originally led by the leftist trade unions but

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<sup>290</sup> Mehmet Sayis, General Secretary of DEV-IŞ. Interview in April 2011.

expanding both in size as well as scope and reaching its peak in early 2011 with the two massive rallies of and for ‘communal existence’.

The strings attached to the economic aid given by Turkey to the TRNC were always unpopular but by 2008 direct opposition against them was openly expressed in the streets. The CTP-led government coalition had unsuccessfully tried earlier to find ways to reduce its dependence on Turkish financial aid, through a reform of the COLA system in an attempt to balance its budget but faced a general strike by a trade union united front in the summer of 2008. The policy of delay in the enforcement of the economic packages and the COLA system reform could no longer be sustained after the rise of the right wing UBP to executive power in 2009. The austerity measures became quite specific and harsh: privatisations of public services and state enterprises, rise of both direct and indirect taxes, significant reductions in the salaries and pensions of the public sector workers starting with newly employed civil servants but planned to extend to the rest, extension of working time in the summer, reduction of the rate of over-time pay and abolition of other benefits. The summer of 2010 constituted the first round of the struggle, including local, sectoral as well as general strikes, paving the way for the more radical and directly political challenge of the 2011 spring.

### 7.3.2. Communal identity: class and ethnicity revisited

The link between economics and politics, always and everywhere a fundamental one despite variations in the form it may take across time and space, assumes a much more intense and direct character in contemporary north Cyprus. This is because of the unique and exceptional state existing as a result of the historical and on-going Cyprus problem. Both the first wave of extended mobilisations at the beginning of the 2000 decade as well as the second wave at its end were sparked by economics but soon acquired a political character, linked – directly in the first revolt, indirectly in the second one – with the on-going peace negotiations both then and now. As I mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the historical ethnic division of the native working class and the territorial division of the country has facilitated the hegemony of communalism and has delegated class to a secondary role vis-à-vis ethnicity. In north Cyprus, because of the size of and the conditions faced by the Turkish Cypriot community, communalism is even stronger compared to the south. However, unlike in the Greek Cypriot community, the forces of the Left in the Turkish Cypriot community have managed in and



through their two recent revolts to articulate a counter-hegemonic conception of the ‘community’ against partition and in support of the reunification of the country on the basis of a bi-communal and bi-zonal federal structure.

The development and articulation of this counter-hegemonic conception of communal identity is to be sure a complex process that warrants research in its own right. For the purposes of the argument here it is enough to give a brief and schematic description and a sketch of the basic coordinates in which it emerged. In a nutshell the failure of the separatist experiment of the TRNC to gain international recognition and the prospect of the entry of the Republic of Cyprus into the EU coinciding with the most elaborate attempt for a settlement in the form of the Anan Plan which made the reunification of the island a concrete possibility and an immediate and visible potentiality, boosted the discourse of Cypro-centrism and effected a shift in the political identification of the community expressed in and by the notion of ‘Cyprioturk’. The displacement of the traditional Turkish Cypriot self identification from ‘Turks of Cyprus’ to ‘Cypriot Turks’ was and is neither accidental nor merely of a symbolic – terminological order, nor insignificant. Identities are of course never rigid, nor universal nor absolute but always fluid, partial and relative as a series of researchers of nationalism have analysed (Mavratsas, 1999, Papadakis, 2005; Panayiotou, 2011). More importantly the ‘Cyprioturk’ is a subject of ambiguity (Derya, 2007), trapped as it is between the Greek Cypriot dominated notion of ‘Cypriotness’ and the nationalist and mainland Turkish dominated notion of ‘Turkishness’, between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus.

Although the mass presence of Turkish immigrants in north Cyprus has been instrumental in stimulating the Cypro-centrism of the Turkish Cypriots and although it is true that Turkish Cypriot communalism undermines the class dimension that links Turkish Cypriot workers to Turkish immigrant workers, it would be problematic to simply view this as a parallel to Greek Cypriot communalism and relations between local and foreign workers in the south. This is because of three factors – a) the relatively huge size and single national origin of the immigrant population, b) the absence of a recognised and independent statehood and the over-powering presence of the Turkish state and c) the potentially open character of the new and leftist oriented Turkish Cypriot communalism both towards Greek Cypriots and towards naturalised Turkish immigrants<sup>291</sup> in an over-arching secular discourse of

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<sup>291</sup> ‘Naturalisation’ here does not refer strictly and solely to citizenship status and should rather be seen more in terms of society than in terms of the state. A secular immigrant of Turkish origin that politically identifies more with Cyprus than

reunification and independence of Cyprus.

Although it is true that sometimes at first sight the 'Cyprioturk' discourse does show signs that resemble a new nationalism of the natives, even with racist prejudice vis-à-vis immigrants, it is much more complex than that and once the political context and conditions are taken into consideration, the notion of 'Cypriot nationalism' like the notion of the 'petty bourgeois community' has to be rejected. Turkish Cypriot communalism as this has been redefined in the last decade is opposed to Turkish control of north Cyprus and strives for communal cultural and political autonomy and the only way for this to be achieved seems to be through the federal reunification of the country.<sup>292</sup> Since the trade unions are at the heart of this attempted radical redefinition of community and since the left-wing ideology is particularly influential in the construction of the Cyprioturk discourse, 'labour rights and interests' and even 'class' assume a more central position in the new political vocabulary. This is not to say that the working class point of view is dominant in the Turkish Cypriot movement, less so in the society of north Cyprus, but the conditions for a class based political and social action beyond ethnicity exist in the north much more than in the south.

I will end this chapter with an illustrative recent incident: 27 Turkish workers were employed in slave-like conditions and when they protested to their employer they were fired and were not even given enough money to buy their tickets back to Turkey. They decided to continue their protest as Turkish citizens outside the Turkish embassy but were simply ignored and told to leave by the officials. The Baraka Cultural Centre, a group of activists that had attracted Tayip Erdogan's anger with their banner in the first 2011 rally saying 'Ankara, take your hand off our shoulders', called DEV-İŞ, whose leadership went there and joined the protest of the Turkish workers, publicising the conditions of their exploitation and supporting their labour rights. The front line pages of the newspapers the next day, talked about Turkey which does not care and does not protect its citizens' rights and the Cypriot communist anti-Turkey activists who do. More than a propaganda victory, this is an image of class that winks ironically while subverting nationalism.

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with Turkey is bound to be more included in the discourse and conception of this new Turkish Cypriot communalism than a devout Muslim identifying with 'motherland Turkey', even if the latter has TRNC citizenship.

<sup>292</sup> Principles of the Platform of the Trade Unions, 2011.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: Conclusions**

Before moving on to the substantive conclusions that can be drawn out from this study, and as an introduction to them, I will refer to two contemporary labour relation issues that were not particularly dealt with in the thesis. These are the public sector labour and trade unions and the industrial relations legislative reform, both of which are relatively popular and fashionable topics lately.

Public sector labour is broadly speaking privileged and public sector workers are and are seen as constituting a labour aristocracy<sup>293</sup>. Although these sorts of generalisation are not entirely accurate, as they tend to lump together all public sector workers neglecting the internal variations and hierarchies in terms of pay, power and status, they are essentially valid in the sense that the industrial relations system in the public sector is much more advanced, structured, adhered to and most importantly beneficial to the employees. There are many reasons for this: historical, political and socio-economic. In a nutshell these can be summed up as: a) the original need of the colonial authorities and then the young independent state to secure the loyalty of the civil service they instituted, through the offering of good pay and conditions, b) the nominal and phenomenal<sup>294</sup> political and ideological neutrality of the civil service that allows it to rise above party and factional politics and constitute a united labour front vis-à-vis the employer state and c) the higher educational level traditionally required for, and status associated with, mental labour and office work.

In the public sector, trade union density reaches 99% and public sector trade unions are particularly strong and especially efficient in securing and maintaining good pay and conditions for their members. The non-profit making rationale of the state and the structural need for the smooth functioning of the state apparatus, on the one hand, and the strong labour market position and associated social power of the civil servants as a whole, on the other, allows and facilitates the benevolent character of the state as an employer and the overall beneficial employment conditions for public sector workers. Public sector trade unions and public sector industrial relations are essentially very similar to the banking sector trade union and labour system<sup>295</sup>. Impersonal structures of authority, detailed procedures and

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<sup>293</sup> This is because of many rights and benefits enjoyed by most public sector workers (whereas only by comparatively few) in the private sector the most important ones being permanent employment and relatively high and steadily increasing salaries.

<sup>294</sup> Nominal and phenomenal because in the late colonial and early independence years left wingers were largely excluded.

<sup>295</sup> This is also the main reason why this thesis does not have a separate analytical section for the public sector.

regulations govern all aspects of the employment relation, including management and promotions and specifying the remuneration scales and benefits and the rights and duties of the workforce. Like ETYK, PASIDI has relatively few professional full-time trade unionists as, on the one hand, the local / departmental committees at workplace level are actually operative on a regular basis dealing with everyday issues and, on the other hand, the labour system is working and there is less need for external checks and controls.

At this point a distinction needs to be made between the civil servants proper, that are employed according to ‘schemes of service’ that constitute legal documents approved by the parliament, and the semi-public sector workers working in the municipal authorities and the relatively autonomous public services that are employed according to regularly renewed collective agreements. The civil servants proper (including public education workers who have their own separate trade unions) are employed directly by the state, paid from the state treasury and are not part of the social security system. Collective bargaining takes place at central level under the auspices of the Director General of the Ministry of Finance and the ‘schemes of service’ are revised accordingly. The semi-public sector workers, on the other hand, are members of the general trade unions and are employed on the basis of collective agreements negotiated every three years at enterprise level but according to framework agreements stipulating the level of the overall pay raises which are negotiated centrally by the national leaderships of the trade unions and the Finance Minister himself (Soumeli, 2008c). Often the framework agreements for the overall pay raises of the semi-public sector workers serve as a reference point for the negotiations regarding the civil servants proper.<sup>296</sup>

I will now move to the issue of the industrial relations legislative reform that is currently underway, opening up thus also the concluding section proper. Although I have described briefly the logic and the procedures of the Cypriot voluntarist industrial relations system in the introductory chapter and have spelled out its key political implications in chapters 4 and 6, I generally refrained from getting too much into its legal and technical details. The rationale for this was to focus on labour relations as they are actually substantiated at workplace level, rather than the rules that determine them or ought to determine them. The *de facto* quasi-legal status of collective agreements was mentioned in chapter 3,

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<sup>296</sup> PASIDI has been asking for improvements in the existing collective bargaining mechanism regarding the civil servants proper, claiming that the Joint Consultative Committee is ineffective in its operation and updated statutory procedures dealing with dispute resolution are needed.

also pointing out however, in the last analysis, the lack of any enforcement mechanisms beyond industrial action. The current industrial relations reform being discussed states more explicitly the legal obligation of the employer to abide by existing collective agreements and gives the right to the trade unions to take employers to the court when they do not and stipulates fines and other sanctions.<sup>297</sup> The most important reforms, however, concern the rights of joining a trade union and introducing a collective agreement. The existing legislation is again strengthened and made more detailed and explicit about the right of professional trade unionists to enter workplaces and discuss with workers, voting procedures and compulsory recognition of new trade unions.<sup>298</sup>

### 8.1. Summing up: employment and work in Cyprus

The end of this research project and the submission of this PhD thesis coincides thus with the government's initiative to reform the legislative context of the industrial relations system while the current negotiation process of the Cyprus problem is also soon coming to its end in one way or another. It is an interesting observation that some of the key issues dealt with in this thesis are also currently being both recognised by and attempted, to some extent at least, to be addressed by the current left-wing government of the country. The deregulation of industrial relations and the decline of trade unionism, on the one hand, and the division of the working class and the country, on the other hand, are explicitly, at the ideological and rhetorical level at least, firmly opposed and clearly disliked by the ruling party AKEL.

The discourse of flexibility in the labour market, although in principle an EU goal and an overall framework for state policy, has not become dominant in Cyprus, at least in the ways and to the extent that it has in other countries. To be sure irregular work has expanded, individualist work arrangements

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<sup>297</sup> The strengthening of the legal status of collective agreements has been demanded by SEK for at least a decade now, seen as the only way through which collective agreements could be imposed on employers. PEO, on the other hand, was resisting that, seeing the legal route as incompatible with class struggle and fearing a significant delegation of regulatory power from the trade union movement to the courts. Interestingly employers had an analogous position warning against bureaucratic entanglements with courts are asked to solve industrial disputes (Phileleftheros, 20/6/2010). Eventually a compromise was reached stipulating the continuation of the 'free bargaining' system and the Industrial Relations Code with legal action serving only as a complementary process in cases of impossibility of enforcement. Thus it can be said that overall the existing voluntarist system survives by becoming a bit less voluntary.

<sup>298</sup> The strengthening of the right of trade union organisation has been a traditional PEO demand and has also been accepted by SEK and DEOK and eventually in principle by the current government. The trade unions' common proposal of 2006 stipulates that 30% of workers in favour of trade union organisation in each workplace should be enough for compulsory recognition and beginning of collective bargaining whereas the government proposal puts the number at 40% (PEO, 2008 pp. 117-118; Messios and Soumeli, 2011 [2010])

have been diffused and trade union power has been eroded – nevertheless these developments are primarily consequences of social structural dynamics and less a result of conscious ideological, political or legal agency and action. This is not to say that neoliberalism did not reach Cyprus. It did, especially so in the 1990s with the DISI governments. However it has not managed to dominate fully in the Cypriot political system nor oust the Keynesian logic from the state elite as the decade of the 2000s has shown.

The globalisation processes, especially the increased capital and labour flows into Cyprus and the entry into the EU which has accelerated them, created new realities on the ground transforming to a significant extent both the economy and the society of Cyprus by the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The expansion of administrative and office work, mental labour in general, has been effected with the more generalised growth of services and the corresponding increase in the educational level of the Cypriot labour force. The manual and low skilled jobs were primarily taken over by the ever increasing immigrant workers from South East Asia and the Middle East, from Eastern Europe, with and without EU passports, and more recently also from China and Africa.

The size of the economy as a whole has expanded and so has the number of firms and jobs available. Most new entrants into the labour market of Cyprus however came and come to face different employment conditions, relatively worse than two or three decades ago. And this seems even more pronounced if one takes into account the relatively higher qualifications and expectations of the new generation of workers as a result of the more generalised improvement in educational level and living standards<sup>299</sup>. For many workers in many sectors the rights and benefits, sometimes even the wages of their older colleagues are simply not applicable or not immediately available to them. Even when there is a collective agreement in the sector or in the firm it is not automatically covering them. Often not to be covered by an existing collective agreement is implicitly a condition for getting the job in the first place.

The fragmentation of the workforce at all levels – workplace, sectoral and national is not a new phenomenon. And neither of course is workers' resistance – individual and collective, organised and non organised, conscious as well as unconscious. Nevertheless both fragmentation and resistance have

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<sup>299</sup> The increasing unemployment, underemployment and irregular employment amongst the youth has been observed but not really contained in the last decade (Trimikliniotis, 2004).

been accentuated in the last decades as a result of the rapidity of the structural change in which existing divisions and factors of hierarchy were transformed. Managerial elaboration and diversification, technical and professional qualifications and ethnic origin brought in new lines of segmentation along the older ones based on age and gender, seniority and skills. Social networks, always an important factor in work life, and especially so in small societies, are no longer based solely on familial and local background and relations but are now wider in scope, more modern in form and in an urban setting as the notions of community and social group themselves are being redefined in the new era. Occupational and sectoral identities remain significant for many workers, especially the core ones, while differentials in pay, employment status and workplace power serve now like in the past as primary elements upon which social cleavages and notions of common interests and common fate are built in and within the labour force.

The deregulation of employment relations, although it might occasionally cater for the desires of and give some freedom to individual workers, usually means in practice employer arbitrariness. It is effected through the promotion of personal contracts of work and personal contracts of services, that is involving essentially subcontracting and piece work. The institution of collective agreements is undermined both directly through employer refusal to have or abide by existing ones and indirectly through non enforcing particular provisions of, and excluding some workers from, the collective agreements. As a result the workforce is segmented into two parts – one employed on the basis of collective agreements and one that is not covered by them. Thus the key regulatory mechanism in the labour process – collective bargaining, becomes relativised and the workplace becomes a hybrid space of dual or multiple terms and conditions of employment.

Immigrant workers constitute at the same time not only the victims of employer discrimination in terms of wages, rights and benefits but also the means through which employers threaten the long acquired rights and benefits of Cypriot workers.<sup>300</sup> The weak labour market position of immigrant workers and their even weaker social position renders them overtly dependent on their employer, who is often also their landlord, making it usually inconceivable to join the trade unions. But even when immigrant workers do become trade union members, it does not follow automatically that they will be employed according to the collective agreements as their terms and conditions of employment are usually pre-

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<sup>300</sup> This is a constant Cypriot workers' complaint and is also described in recent trade union research (Antoniou, 2010).

agreed on the basis of personal contracts usually stipulating longer than the norm hours and lower than the norm wages. Thus, most of the relatively few immigrant workers that join the trade unions only gain cheap medical care and a more formalised access to trade union help in cases of specific problems they might face at work.

The more extreme form of irregular and flexible labour is informal and undeclared work which has been steadily expanding over the last years and is of course directly related to the more general increase in the number of immigrant workers. In construction the authorities themselves admit that it stands around 30% and although inspections have increased and penalties have become more severe, this phenomenon has deep roots and its eradication does not seem to be within reach. 'Black labour' characterised by super-exploitation in the form of low wages, even unpaid work, is in the last analysis a structural element in capitalism, a product of the asymmetry of power between social groups and forces and embedded hierarchies of contemporary societies – the existence of a black labour market essentially defines and frames the normal labour market.

## 8.2. Looking forward: problems and prospects of the labour movement in Cyprus

Despite the fact that trade unions do not accept without protest the deregulation of labour relations and insist on the necessity of respecting the collective agreements, the avoidance of personal contracts and subcontracting and the eradication of undeclared work, they have essentially for more than a decade been in a defensive position. As moderate and pragmatic forces they realise what is possible today and make sure that they distinguish between their rhetoric and their action – avoiding getting engaged in battles that they fear that they are bound to lose. Some trade unionists admit that they were late to understand and react in relation to the consequences of the restructuring that took place in the previous decades, allowing the employers to get on the offensive and manage to set the field of today's conflict.

When personal contracts first appeared for example, originally for some professionals, the reaction was reluctant. When in the context of the rapid construction boom, subcontracting expanded in all sorts of construction work, again there was no decisive reaction. When the immigrants appeared as guest workers, the stance of the trade unions was negative and it took them years to start the effort to organise them. With the entry into the EU, they were not ready at all to accept in their ranks, let alone



organise sustained campaigns of recruiting the tens of thousands of EU workers that entered the Cypriot labour market. Even today trade unionists fail literally and metaphorically to find a common language of communication with immigrant, even with Turkish Cypriot workers.<sup>301</sup> The reasons why trade unions are on the defensive are multiple, both as a result of global and European as well as Cypriot local conditions. The decline of trade unionism, the fall of trade union density, the weakening of class rationale and rhetoric are international phenomena and as such appear in Cyprus as well, accompanying the also international tendencies of erosion of 'typical, permanent and regulated work'. In fact one might say that in Cyprus trade unions are comparatively big and strong, trade union density is amongst the higher in Europe and flexible and atypical labour relations were late to appear and are not as prevalent as in other countries such as Greece or Italy or even Britain<sup>302</sup>.

Behind the continuing numerical strength of the trade unions, however, their power has been eroded both internally and externally. Internally because of their more generalised depreciation in the eyes of the workers who remain largely indifferent, because of the democratic deficits and the delegation of power, duties and responsibilities to the trade union bureaucracy and the professionals as the local workplace committees tend to under-function and because of the prevalent conception of trade unions as organisations that are autonomous from their members. Externally because of the more general transformation of the labour relations system as a result of the entry into the EU leading into the expansion in scope and role of labour legislation to the extent that the philosophy of the existing voluntary tripartite system has been undermined (Ioannou, 2007) and along with it the need of the trade unions as protective mechanisms for the workers. Effectively there is a new form of regulation through labour law, to the extent that it is being enforced, and which is not at all satisfactory as the state itself admits, especially with respect to non Cypriot workers, which in theory restricts the lawlessness of capital but in practice individualises labour relations and creates a climate in which the role of the trade unions as active agents in the determination and regulation of the terms and conditions of labour is underplayed.

This view that the utility of traditional trade unionism has expired as a result of increasing legal intervention in labour relations is being expressed by some employers and workers alike. And this is to

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<sup>301</sup> The situation with Turkish Cypriot workers in the south is of course different to that of the immigrant workers. Their status as Republic of Cyprus citizens, and the existing cooperation, although largely symbolic, between Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot trade unions has allowed many to join PEO and even some to join SEK.

<sup>302</sup> OEB (2007) laments that flexible employment is still in an embryonic stage in Cyprus.

be sure directly related to the more general weakness of the trade unions, both real and perceived, which come to depend more and more on the state, with a significant part of their activity being to report to the Labour Ministry the violations of labour law and the non enforcement of collective agreements. The reform of the industrial relations system that is currently being discussed is to a significant extent an answer to these views – aiming in other words to boost trade union power simultaneously in two fronts: legally fortifying collective bargaining and agreements and making organisation in non-unionised workplaces an easier endeavour. In theory the current government's proposal for industrial relations legislative reform is expected to arrest or at least restrict the deregulation process and expand in both scale and scope the role of the trade unions in the labour process.

However, political intention is one thing and practical result is another. In the last analysis the terms of industrial relations are not a matter of rules but of actual practices and thus decided by the power balances both at workplace and at sectoral level. In fact, the recently increased role of legislation as a means of labour process regulation both reflects and overshadows the existing reality of deregulation. Trade union weakness is at the same time both a cause and a consequence of the employers' offensive. And there seems to be little possibility for subverting or altering this situation. The more generalised avoidance of general and long strikes and the self restraining of the trade unions in mobilisation exercises aiming more to put some pressure rather than to impose terms to the employers or in symbolic work stoppages that demonstrate a conception of the strike more as a weapon of 'threat' than a weapon of 'method' for the achievement of bargaining goals, had and has led to the insufficient experience of organised class struggle and the conception of the trade unions more as institutions of labour services rather than vehicles of struggle. And to be sure the distance that characterises those who are and those who are not trade union members, the core with the benefits and the periphery of precarity, restricts and sometimes prevents common action in workplaces – eg when in the context of negotiations for yearly wage raises trade unions call for a strike, the participation of workers not covered by collective agreements and thus not immediately affected, is uncertain and doubtful.

Lastly the historical and continuing division of the Cypriot working class and the country on the basis of ethnicity, on the one hand, and its recent transformation from a country exporting to a country importing labour power, on the other, and especially with the 'guest worker model' and thus the

absence of a substantial number of second generation immigrants, had as a consequence the strengthening of communalism as a dominant conceptual framework against that of the working class beyond all sorts of institutional divisions. For many trade unionists, including those from the Left, north and south, when they speak about the working class, they mean essentially and implicitly the 'community of Cypriot workers' and not the 'workers that live in Cyprus'. The Cyprus conflict and the logic of defending communal autonomy or the state(s) puts clear limits and frames to the trade union movement preventing politically, and to a certain extent also ideologically, the transcendence of the ethnic divisions between workers in Cyprus.

In these conditions, with the employers' offensive questioning today even the utility of collective bargaining, on the one hand, and the multiple segmentations – social, political and cultural – of the working class, on the other, the prospects are not promising for the labour movement. The inability of the trade unions both to recruit in their ranks a substantial segment of workers constituting the periphery of the working class and to articulate a class discourse on the basis of which to develop a strategy of new universal demands is both a fact and a basic political problem. In the context of the global crisis and the ideological collapse, the development of a new and *de facto* multiple and pluralist conception of the worker collectivity becomes a crucial need in order to give a new push and organisational muscle to the existing class antagonism. Whether the Cypriot trade unions can assume this role is of course an open social and political question.

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2 managers and 6 middle managers, 1 accountant and 1 quality manager

4 restaurant and 3 bar workers

5 cooks, 1 assistant and 1 kitchen cleaner

2 housekeepers and 3 cleaners

2 reception workers and 3 technicians

Case study Two: 23 interviews

1 manager and 4 middle managers

4 restaurant and 2 bar workers

3 cooks and 2 kitchen cleaners

4 cleaners

2 reception workers and 1 technician

Case study Three: 52 interviews

3 managers and 6 middle managers and 1 accountant

7 restaurant and 6 bar workers and 1 singer

8 cooks, 1 assistant and 3 kitchen cleaners

3 housekeepers and 5 cleaners

3 reception workers, 3 technicians and 2 clerks

Case study Four: 23 interviews in four workplaces (national and district offices and two branches)

3 managers and 3 middle managers

5 front-line employees

5 back office employees

2 catering and 1 security workers, 1 canteen manager, 1 housekeeper and 2 cleaners

Case study Five: 25 interviews

3 managers and 5 middle managers

5 front-line employees

10 back office employees

2 messengers

Case study Six: 21 interviews in two workplaces (offices and construction site)

1 manager and 1 middle manager, 2 foremen, 1 subcontractor and 1 accountant

4 office workers

5 direct workers

6 subcontract workers

Case study Seven: 20 interviews in three workplaces (offices and two construction sites)

1 middle manager, 1 foreman and 4 subcontractors

2 office workers

5 direct workers

7 subcontract workers

Other: 30 interviews

Trade unionists at all levels: 16

Employers and their representatives: 8

Experts (state officials, lawyers and researchers): 6

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