



Employee Relations

Industrial relations in Spain - strong conflicts, weak actors and fragmented institutions

Holm-Detlev Köhler,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Holm-Detlev Köhler, (2018) "Industrial relations in Spain – strong conflicts, weak actors and fragmented institutions", *Employee Relations*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-08-2017-0195>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/ER-08-2017-0195>

Downloaded on: 16 May 2018, At: 09:44 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 54 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by

Token: Eprints:Y3ERHNJZH2XDYG8WBHKZ:

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

Industrial relations in Spain – strong conflicts, weak actors and fragmented institutions

Holm-Detlev Köhler

Department of Sociology, Universidad de Oviedo, Oviedo, Spain

Received 25 August 2017
Accepted 30 August 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct the development of industrial relations (IR) in Spain since the democratic transition and analyses the current dilemmas of its social and political actors in the context of the long-lasting economic downturn.

Design/methodology/approach – Combining a political economy, identifying Spain as a particular variety of modern capitalism, and actor-centred historical institutionalism approach, outlining the formation and strategies of the main social actors, the paper draws on the broad range of research on IR in Spain and its theoretical debates, including proper research in the field.

Findings – The legacies of the latecomer industrialisation and the semi-peripheral development model still shape the Spanish economy and IR. The impact of the current economic and political-institutional crisis affects the entire institutional IR system and its actors shifting power towards the individual employer thus weakening trade unions, labour rights and collective bargaining. Regarding the theoretical debate on corporatism, the Spanish case provides ambiguous results. The lack of a coherent institutional system and efficient political administration limits the effectiveness of corporatist arrangements and reduces them to contingent concertation strategies. Spain confirms that IR still largely depend on the specific national variety of capitalism that condition economic development and resources for political exchange.

Originality/value – The paper presents an original, theoretical-informed reconstruction of the Spanish IR and allows an understanding of the current institutional transformations and strategic dilemmas in the light of historical legacies. Additionally, the theoretical debates on neo-corporatism and semi-peripheral development are enriched through its application to the Spanish case.

Keywords Strategic choice, Trade unions, Collective bargaining, Corporatism, Industrial relations in Spain, Semi-peripheral Fordism

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The cross-national comparative literature on employment relations is full of triple classifications such as “concertation”, “political isolation” and “pluralistic fragmentation” (Regini, 1986); “contestation, pluralism, and corporatism” (Crouch, 1993) or “liberal pluralism, corporatism and statism” (van Waarden, 1995), all of them difficult to apply to the Spanish case for two main reasons. Industrial Relations (IR) in Spain have never corresponded to one more or less coherent model, but always combined elements of different models often in a contradictory way. This leads us to our hypothesis that Spain is a fragmented political-economic regime which lacks institutional complementarities. The second flaw of these classifications is their exclusive focus on the tripartite institutional relationships, but IR are to a large extent power struggles and conflicts with strategic collective action and often contradictory constellations. We therefore opt to see IR as a part of the political-economic regime as a historically developed and always fragile constellation of social and political actors regulating the conditions of the employment relationships.

Our approach is very much inspired by regulation theories that distinguish among fordist accumulation regimes and modes of regulation and post-fordist, finance-led global accumulation and regulation regimes (Boyer and Saillard, 2002; Grahl and Teague, 2000). Two main advantages lead us to this approach. On the one hand, it allows us to distinguish different national institutional systems and, at the same time, link them to general capitalist development. On the other hand, the relations and contradictions between economy, society



and politics come into focus. Although Spain has not fitted in a “normal” fordist trajectory due to long dictatorship and late industrialisation, the regulationist framework allows for the analysis of Spain’s particular incorporation into Western European capitalism and the correspondent institution building.

Following Richard Hyman’s critique of IR as autonomous social sub-systems, we thus incorporate the approach adopted here into a tradition of critical political economy. This considers employment relations embedded in a broader set of social and economic forces that condition the forms of transformation of labour power into productive labour:

The national and transnational dynamics of capital accumulation, systems of power relations, processes of ideological formation and historically sedimented institutional structures all exert major determining influences over the micro detail of day-to-day industrial relations. Theory in industrial relations must be part of a general theory of this totality of social relations of production. (Hyman, 1994, p. 171)

To avoid frequent functionalist or structuralist pitfalls of these approaches, we insist in the margins for strategic action and thus the permanent struggle for institutional change. It is to assume that all actors, and particularly all collective actors such as trade unions, are never completely determined by system or societal context conditions nor by internal path dependencies, but always maintain a certain degree of agency or ability to strategise. However, to understand the strategic choices in the context of multiple constraints, it is indispensable to analyse the institutional setting and its historical legacies. These are just some elementary lessons from sociological research in the tradition of Crozier and Friedberg’s (1980) theory of power in organisations and Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory.

The following sections are structured as follows. The next section outlines the formation of the productive model and democratic IR in Spain. The following two sections analyse the evolution of the productive model and the employment regime during the European integration period (1982-1993) and the speculative housing boom (1994-2008), referring to the corresponding academic debates on varieties of capitalism and corporatism. The inception of the severe economic crisis led to the recent period of a semi-peripheral, Mediterranean neoliberalism, discussed in the fifth section. A short conclusive section finalises the paper.

Semi-peripheral Fordism and democratic transition (1959-1982)

Actors and institutions of current IR in Spain emerged during the second period of dictatorship and the following transition to democracy. The turbulent history of Spain left little space for historical experiences with democratic and autonomous IR and collective bargaining. The timid projects to introduce social rights and free associations during the final years of the restoration regime at the beginning of the 20th century, and during the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera (1923-1931), in the framework of the Institute for Social Reforms, were soon abandoned (Barrio Alonso, 2014). Only the short and conflict-driven II Republic (1931-1936) saw the free collective bargaining and association rights, although always under the pressure and opposition of conservative employers and social forces, on the one hand, and of radical sectors of the labour movement, dominated by revolutionary anarchist groups around the National Confederation of Labour CNT (Confederación Nacional del Trabajo), on the other. With the, after nearly three years of Civil War (1936-1939), finally successful coup of Franco’s military forces against the Republic fierce repression replaced collective interest representation. All employers and employees were compulsorily organised in the Spanish Syndicate Organization (Organización Sindical Española (OSE)) controlled by the state under the fascist principles of “unity, totality and hierarchy”.

Spain is a latecomer to the industrialised world with still about 40 per cent of the workforce employed in agriculture in 1960 when industrialisation was pushed forward by the new technocrat elite of the Franco regime. At that time, only a few northern regions, with Catalonia at the forefront and the metal and mining regions Basque Country and Asturias had significant industrial development. It was during the “Spanish economic miracle” (1960-1973) when the main fundamentals of the current economic structure were established. Spain had joined the Western System during the 1950s after reaching an agreement with the USA in 1953 and could benefit from financial and technical support from the Bretton Woods organisations (IMF, World Bank) due to the new climate of trust and confidence. This facilitated a turnaround of the economic policy towards a sort of indicative planning with growth poles, attracting foreign investment, export subsidies, currency devaluation, fiscal consolidation and additional development measures, all aiming at the economic modernisation in the context of a favourable economic environment in Western Europe. All this was packed in a new discourse of productivity and rationalisation, thus marginalising the former fascist and national-catholic ideology. The renewed Franco dictatorship was converted into an authoritarian-technocratic development regime.

During this period, Spain developed modern automotive, chemical, electric and food industries, while tourism became a leading economic sector. The massive migration towards the emerging industrial areas – some five million people left their homes towards the emerging industrial areas or Northern Europe – were the human base for the implementation of Fordist practices of work organisation and the related habits of urban living and consuming, “a new Fordist working class” (Domènech Sampere, 2003, p. 93; Babiano, 1993). The new and fast growing industrial areas around Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville, La Coruña, etc. became together with the few old industrial areas in the Basque Country and Asturias the context for the rise of the democratic opposition and the “new” labour movement with the emerging clandestine union organisations Comisiones Obreras (CCOO – Workers’ Commissions) and Unión Sindical Obrera (Workers’ Union). The “old” labour movement, namely the socialist Union General de Trabajadores (UGT – General Workers Union), the anarquosindicalist CNT and the Basque nationalist Euzko Langilleen Alkartasuna (ELA – Basque Workers’ Solidarity), remained in exile until the democratic transition with low involvement in the anti-francoist democratic opposition.

The 1960s and early 1970s witnessed several waves of illegal strike action and mobilisations, always combining struggles for better working conditions with claims for political democracy, and some non-official forms of collective bargaining at firm-level, “private agreements between workers and employers” with the workforce exercising pressure through shop floor actions (stops, slow work, sit-down strikes, etc.) (Domènech Sampere, 2003, p. 102). At the same time, the vertical union opened some timid spaces for collective bargaining at firm level with the elections of works committees (*jurados de la empresa*) and a Law on Collective Bargaining (1958). In a growing number of firms, democratic opposition groups managed to use these institutions for their interests (“infiltration strategy”), although the ongoing constant repression often impeded effective interest representation. With the industrialisation, however, labour conflict had definitely re-emerged as part of an ambiguous situation of semi-clandestine activity, somewhat tolerated but frequently repressed (Martín Valverde, 1991, p. 9). To interpret the presence of clandestine workers’ commissions delegates in many committees as a “symbiotic relationship” with the Francoist OSE in the context of a continuity of modernising IR since the 1950s, as Joseph Foweraker (1987) does, is, at least, exaggerated given the degree of repression till the end of the regime. Thus, in 1967, the Supreme Court explicitly declared the activities of workers’ commissions as illegal initiating a new wave of repression, the clandestine CCOO executive were imprisoned and the following workplace elections in 1969 cancelled. Even after Franco’s death, the police killed several workers in wildcat strikes as for example occurred in Vitoria in March 1976.

The authoritarian economic modernisation project thus pushed the Spanish economy and society forward towards modern European capitalism, but established various structural weaknesses that harm the Spanish economy even today and have never been tackled by successive democratic governments. Spain depends on imports of foreign capital, know-how and technology and lacks domestic industrial capital. It also depends on oil imports and has unsustainable energy consuming equipment. There is a constant inflationary pressure and trade deficit, which had to be compensated by periodical currency devaluations, the income of tourism and the emigrant remittances. The high proportion of low-track employment in the service and construction sectors, the underdeveloped vocational training and innovation system, the dominance of very small micro-enterprises[1] and the large informal sector are additional factors for the structurally weak competitiveness of the Spanish economy. The authoritarian development regime thus led to an incomplete or semi-peripheral Fordism with only partially modernised economic structures and still traditional dysfunctional political regulation (Holman, 1988; Banyuls *et al.*, 2009). Babiano (1993) speaks of a specific combination of an emergent Fordism with industrial militarisation – military forces organised the big industrial firms and sectors – and state paternalism regarding housing and family policies.

The oil crisis in 1973 therefore hit the Spanish economy particularly hard and coincided with the complicated democratic transition process. The following years, until Spain joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1986, were characterised by severe downsizing and idling processes in basic industries and banking, strong fiscal and inflation control measures, deregulation of the labour market and the rise of unemployment. The EEC membership had some immediate benefits for Spain as foreign capital used the country as a low-cost entrance to the European market and Spain received, during two decades, huge development and restructuring funds which facilitated important public infrastructure investments. The early 1990s brought Spain back to its economic vulnerability with unemployment over 20 per cent, the need for currency devaluation and restructuring of the banking sector.

Over the course of the democratic transition significant workers and union rights were achieved by the strong and constant pressure of worker mobilisation and collective action. In 1976, freedom of association opened the legalisation process for hundreds of clandestine or exiled worker organisations. In 1977, the right to strike was established and in 1978, the first free elections of works committees took place. In the same year, the new democratic constitution guaranteed fundamental civil and labour rights. The Workers' Statute (1980) and the Trade Union Freedom Act (1985) set up the basic norms for the democratic IR system. Since then, several labour reform acts adjusted these two basic laws to the ongoing changes in the labour market and the actors' power constellations.

The transition years were full of strategic options and choices particularly among the labour movement and trade unions given the weakness of the government and employers' associations. The main cleavage existed between the internal democratic opposition, with a strong presence of the Communist Party, and a wide range of radical left-wing groups, on the one hand, and the returning exile organisations with the renewed Socialist Party PSOE and UGT trade union which benefitted from important support from German and Swedish social democratic organisations, on the other. Regarding IR, the "new" labour movement, which had successfully entered the Francoist vertical union during the final period of dictatorship at many local and firm levels establishing effective worker representation, tried to continue these unitary electoral structures (works committees). The exiled organisations, the UGT and CNT, felt excluded and marginalised by this strategy and therefore rejected any form of common platform demanding the dismantling of the complete vertical union structure. The specific context of the democratic transition, with the democratic opposition

not being able to defeat the forces of the old regime and achieve a “democratic rupture” and the moderate reformists of Franco’s state feeling the strong pressure towards democratic reforms, led to a sequence of reform pacts and compromises. The mixed representation system with works committees and trade union sections, the dominance of the delegate workplace election system and the fragmented and weak articulation of the collective bargaining system, were the result of these struggles and power constellations.

The period of democratic consolidation (1977-1985) may be characterised as macro-concertation with several nationwide social pacts signed by the largest trade unions UGT and CCOO, the latter abstaining from signing some pacts but involved in the bargaining process, the recently founded Spanish Confederation of Employers’ Organisations (Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (CEOE)) and the government. The experience was initiated by the Moncloa Pacts of 1977, attained among the government and the political parties. This political pact was followed by a series of bipartite agreements between unions and employers’ associations in 1979, 1980-1981 and 1983 and tripartite ones 1982 and 1985-1986. The outcome was the legitimisation of the new democratic and IR institutions including the large trade unions and employers’ associations, the marginalisation of radical political and union groups, the control of inflation and wage moderation (not of the growing unemployment) and a general image of Spain now having entered modern capitalist Europe (Royo, 2002; Oliet, 2004). Even among the two dominant trade unions, the macro-concertation favoured clearly the moderate UGT, arising soon as an equally strong organisation and supported by the governments and employers’ association, in detriment of the CCOO which found itself often marginalised and discriminated, e.g. in the distribution of the accumulated trade union patrimony assigned as a compensation to the fees to the vertical OSE during Franquism. The institutional setting, however, established in this period implied an often contradictory mix of dualist and unitarist representation structures, strong and weak state interventionism, catholic and social democratic welfare institutions with important areas such as vocational training or occupational and skill classifications without regulation. The aforementioned structural weaknesses of the Spanish productive model could not be tackled effectively under these circumstances.

The initial period of concertation established some of the characteristics that were to become permanent in the Spanish experience. On the one hand, it opened a process of organisational concentration of social agents, backed by a high social recognition and by some institutional incentives. This allowed the social agents to gain a high level of representativeness. On the other hand, the first period conduced to the achievement of high social legitimisation of social pacts as an instrument of negotiated reforms that pushed future governments to further attain them, be it by participating directly in the negotiations, be it by participating indirectly and incorporating the contents of the agreements into legislation.

The consolidation of the bi-union model is linked to the system of union representativeness established by the Trade Union Freedom Act (1985). The right to sign binding collective agreements and participate in tripartite bodies depends on the results of workplace elections. “Representative” union organisations need more than 10 per cent of delegates at the national level or more than 15 per cent at the regional (“autonomous community”) level in the case of regionalist trade union organisations. The UGT and the CCOO are the only organisations that fulfil the national-level requirements while the Basque nationalist unions, ELA-STV and LAB, and the Galician CIG are the only organisations that fulfil the regional requirements in their respective regions. Until the mid-1980s, inter-union competition was extremely fierce with the main organisations UGT and CCOO fighting for hegemony and reproducing the competition between the two left-wing political parties, PSOE and PCE.

Applying the representativeness criteria of number of members, number of contributors and strength in relevant workforce elections, the high participation and representativeness, based on the electoral strength, together with the low membership figures, has motivated the labelling of Spanish trade unions as “voters trade-unionism rather than members trade-unionism” (Martín Valverde, 1991, p. 24). It is their electoral strength rather than their membership that is regarded as the source of their legitimacy and representativeness and the bargaining power of the major unions is relatively immune from membership fluctuations. Works Committee elections not only provide high turnouts regarding representativeness in collective bargaining and institutional participation, they also entitle union activists to paid release from work and dedicate part of their time to union apparatus, a very important organisational resource for unions with low membership fees (Table I).

The works committees, clearly dominated by trade union candidates, are the most important representative organs at firm level, complemented by union sections in larger enterprises. The Spanish delegates have considerable information, consultation and bargaining rights, including the right to strike, but no formal participation rights. Although the union presence in small enterprises, the huge majority in Spain, is very low, bargaining coverage is high with more than 80 per cent of the workforce belonging to a collective agreement (normally a sector agreement) due to extension clauses (*erga omnes*).

The Spanish employers, with a few exceptions mainly in Catalonia, lacked a democratic organisational tradition. Faced with a strong union movement and the need to set up democratic organisational structures, Spanish employers founded the CEOE in 1977, building strongly on the administrative structures of the compulsory Francoist vertical union OSE. Within a few years, and particularly after the integration of the small- and medium-sized enterprise association CEPYME (1980), the CEOE obtained a monopoly on employer interest representation in Spain. Currently, 70-80 per cent of Spanish employers are affiliated to the CEOE. Its structure continues to be based on a mixture of territorial and sectoral bodies combining the functions of trade associations with the industrial relations role of employers' associations. “CEOE's inclusive nature and the wide variety of employer interests that it represents have prompted an organizational style that leaves considerable autonomy to member associations and avoids conflict on issues sensitive to its diverse constituents” (Martínez Lucio, 1998, p. 434). The manner of institutionalisation of democratic IR with participation in public bodies such as the national and regional economic

Year	CCOO (%)	UGT (%)	USO (%)	ELA-STV (%)	LAB (%)	CIG (%)	Others (%)
1978	34.45	21.69	5.56	0.99 (18.9)		0.55 (22.3)	20.85
1980	30.86	29.27	8.68	2.44 (25.6)	0.48 (4.7)	1.01 (17.4)	11.94
1982	33.40	36.71	4.64	3.30 (30.2)	0.68 (5.9)	1.17 (18.9)	8.69
1986	34.27	40.19	3.83	2.92 (34.9)	1.06 (10.7)	1.34 (21.2)	9.95
1990	37.60	43.10	3.00	3.2 (37.8)	1.27 (13.1)	1.5 (23.4)	9.70
1995	37.74	35.51	3.56	2.97 (39.7)	1.22 (15.4)	1.91 (26)	17.09
1999	37.63	37.17	3.49	3.06 (40.5)	1.33 (15.2)	1.62 (26.2)	15.62
2003	38.74	36.80	3.11	3.24 (41)	1.37 (15.2)	1.62 (26.2)	15.12
2007	39.09	37.15	2.95	3.13 (40.2)	1.39 (16)	1.82 (28.6)	14.45
2011	38.38	36.33	3.43	3.03 (39.8)	1.39 (17.2)	1.63 (26.4)	15.77
2015	36.17	33.30	3.89	2.58 (40.6)	1.24 (18.9)	nd	22.25

Table I.

Results of works committee elections in Spain

Note: The figures in brackets refer to the proportion of delegates achieved by regionalist trade unions in their respective territories

Source: Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) (2012)

and social councils, the National Employment Institute, the universities, the social security and several tripartite bargaining councils for the social partners contributed to consolidate the position of the CEOE and its affiliates in modern Spanish society.

European integration and consolidation (1982-1993)

With the failed coup of a group of military and Guardia Civil corps against the new democracy in 1981 and the following overwhelming victory of the socialist party PSOE in the general elections in 1982, the Spanish democracy became consolidated. However, the high expectations towards the development of a social and participative democracy were largely disappointed. Although some progress was made in the universalisation of basic social welfare services, such as health care and compulsory free education (6-16 years), in terms of economic policy and IR the socialist governments (1982-1996) joint the dominant trend towards neoliberalism. Restrictive labour market and pension reforms provoked increasing conflicts with the trade unions, including the socialist UGT, while macro-concertation was abandoned. A strong government and a consolidated employers' association lost the motivation for social dialogue with the trade unions in a situation of defence and marginalisation. On the other hand, the decentralisation of the state in this period, transferring many competencies to the autonomous communities, set the basis for an ineffective and clientelistic administration and centrifugal political tendencies.

Institutionalist political scientists see in the institutional degeneration and the collusion between political and economic elites, who established a system to extract resources from taxpayers for their own profit, the core problem of contemporary Spain. "The decentralization process [...] has led to the creation of 17 regional governments, as well of thousands of public agencies and companies that became instruments of political patronage. The subsequent decentralization of political parties that followed the political one led to the emergence of regional, local elites that took over the local and regional institutions, including the Cajas (savings banks), whose boards were quickly filled with political appointees who used their position for their own personal gain and/or as a clientelist instrument to finance their projects" (Royo, 2014, p. 1574).

The economic crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s, with the unemployment rate rising from 4.4 per cent (1976) to 21.6 per cent (1986) and an inflation rate beyond 20 per cent, forced the new socialist government (1982) to initiate structural reforms. In his comparative study of Spain, Portugal and Greece, Otto Holman (1988) analysed these reform policies of socialist-led governments, the "internalization of international austerity", characteristic for Southern European semi-peripheral Fordism. In contrast to the leading core economies, semi-peripheral economic modernisation led to a lower structural coherence of the national production apparatus, higher differences in productivity among sectors and industries, higher inflation, commercial trade deficit, less skilled workforces and potentially more social conflict.

Similar to other Mediterranean countries, Spain had a large public industrial sector including coal mining, steel mills, ship yards, aluminium factories and a large automotive company SEAT. All these industries were highly unionised and played a central role in the collective IR, but were ill-prepared for international competition. In the course of the integration into the common European market, all these firms had to be downsized or closed down, a very conflictive process with huge employment and trade union membership losses during the 1980s. In the following decade, after very costly modernisation measures, these public industries were privatised and handed over to multinational companies. Spain lost in this period a proper industrial base and depends today on transnational capital. Not only manufacturing, also food industries, supermarkets and other growth industries came under the rule of French, German and Italian companies. IR imply since then mainly concession bargaining by unions and governments to avoid relocations and safeguard the employment

against international competition. Since then, a general trend towards deindustrialisation and a shift from manufacturing to service and construction industries characterises the Spanish economy and IR.

The labour market reforms opted for a deregulation of the external labour markets introducing a wide range of fixed-term contracts which were extensively used by the employers. Spain soon became a leader in fixed-term contracts in Europe whose participation in total labour contracts rose from 4 per cent to more than 30 per cent during the 1980s. Open-ended contracts became the exception, fixed-term contracts the rule and the labour market was strongly segmented: older male workers with high stability and protection and younger and female workers with high rotation and low protection. On the other hand, internal labour markets remained unchallenged by politics and collective bargaining, thus delaying the necessary modernisation of work organisation and skill and career schemes. This politically induced dualisation and segmentation converted the Spanish labour market into a structural employment regime, characterised by low quality of work (dominance of unskilled low-wage jobs), low productivity, difficulties for trade union recruitment, discrimination of female, young and immigrant workforce, inequality and an underdeveloped welfare regime.

EU accession (1986), the end of tripartite concertation (1985) and the following nationwide general strike against the neoliberal social and labour reform acts of the socialist government (1988) represented a turning point in Spanish IR. The unions emancipated themselves from political party tutelage and started to cooperate within the framework of a “unity of action” agreement. Since that time, they have entered into collective bargaining with common strategy platforms and the strong inter-union rivalry has been downplayed. The end of the 1980s thus witnessed important strategic choices of the social actors. The strategy of the socialist government to compensate the UGT for accepting the restrictive economic and social policies and foster inter-union rivalry failed and was contested by the unions with mutual approaching and common collective opposition. This strategic turn was particularly difficult for the UGT, which felt that its expectations towards a socialist government concerning organisational benefits and advances in social welfare were frustrated such that it had to break with its historical sister organisation PSOE.

In this period, a vivid debate among Spanish academics on Spain as a case of Mediterranean (weak) neo-corporatism emerged. Following Streeck and Schmitter (1985), neo-corporatism re-emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in late fordist societies as a distinct model of social order besides community (spontaneous solidarity), market (competition) and the state (hierarchy) allowing for the systematic incorporation of organised interests into public and private governance. In a process of “political exchange” (Pizzorno, 1978; Regini, 1984), governments achieve legitimacy and social peace while trade unions are recognised as social partners and bargaining agencies. Employers are the most vulnerable agents of neo-corporatist arrangements as they traditionally prefer their individual private property power and only participate in collective bargaining and tripartite concertation under the pressure of political and social groups and organisations. Strong neo-corporatist regimes, as exemplified in countries such as Austria, Sweden or the Netherlands, are characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation where private interest groups not only participate in political concertation but also in the control and implementation of social and economic policies. Weak neo-corporatism, in contrast, is limited to tripartite concertation and bargaining of certain policies such as labour reform acts or pension schemes (Lehmbruch, 1984).

In Spain, many scholars interpreted the praxis of macro-concertation during the democratic transition as institutionalisation of a new modern political system, a “final break with the past” (Giner, 1985, p. 343) on the passage “from despotism to parliamentarism” (Giner and Sevilla, 1980), where social conflicts are managed through collective actors and negotiations (Pérez Yruela and Giner, 1988; Zaragoza, 1988; Solé, 1990). Others criticised the

inflationary use of the corporatist vocabulary in a case; where the participating organisations had neither a representative monopoly nor the power to implement the negotiated objectives; where no institutional participation of the organised interest groups existed; where the social pacting was limited to a few elite groups; and where the motivation for the macro-concertation were short-term political and organisational aims such as legitimisation of the fragile democracy and its new social agents (Alonso, 1991). Concertation and social dialogue appear in Spain periodically as a government strategy to achieve legitimisation and social peace but lack an institutionalised participation of civil society associations in public policies and agencies (Martínez Lucio, 1998)[2]. The political exchange consists in “organizational benefits” (Roca Jusmet, 1991, p. 366) where trade unions and employers’ associations accept economic and social policies for receiving institutional participation, recognition and economic subsidies. In the case of governments and employers, the strengthening of moderate, cooperative and nationwide trade unions against more radical and regionalist trade union groups add another incentive for concertation. “The success of neo-corporatism as a governmental strategy in Spain has resided precisely in its contingent, non-institutionalized character” (Martínez Lucio, 1992, p. 507).

Regarding the theoretical debate, the Spanish experience points to two frequent shortcomings in the literature. Corporatism is often identified with frequent social pacting but concertation does not always indicate effective political participation of interest groups or the establishment of a stable corporatist system, where interest groups form part of the administrative government structure. Concertation and corporatism should therefore be clearly differentiated in line with Baglioni’s (1987) classical distinction between corporatist and pluralist forms of political exchange: the first firmly embedded in mutually reinforcing institutions, the latter a contingent and precarious alignment of interests. The second shortcoming in the corporatist literature refers to the overestimating of institutional factors such as monopolist and centralist interest organisations, Keynesian class compromise or Fordist production regimes, whereas the Spanish and other Southern European experiences with concertation show the importance of strategic choices of the main actors (Royo, 2002). Not strong governments and centralised associations, but weak governments and associations in a context of political and economic turbulences may adopt a concertation strategy to legitimate and consolidate their weak policies and organisations (Nonell *et al.*, 2011).

“Bubble corporatism” (1994-2008)

The Spanish governments of the 1990s and 2000s, dominated in alternation by the Socialist PSOE (1982-1996; 2004-2011) and the conservative People’s Party (PP) (1996-2004, 2011), organised a speculative real estate bubble with impressive growth rates from 1994 to 2007. Low interest rates, excess of liquidity in international financial markets, the securities of the Eurozone, decline in public debt and public policy incentives created the conditions for private debt and a prolonged demand-driven growth cycle centred in housing and real estate, a new economic miracle “based on bricks and mortar” (Royo, 2014, p. 1581). The aforementioned structural weaknesses, however, were even intensified by the huge low-quality employment sectors, speculative financial activities, unsustainable construction projects and the networks of corruption around the municipal management of licences and allowances.

The employment boom that increased the working population from 16 million (1993) to 23 million (2008), and the employed persons from 12 million (1993) to 22 million (2007), had some particular and problematic features. The major part of employment creation occurred in sectors like personal services, retail, hotels and restaurants and construction with high proportions of low-quality, low-income and low-stability jobs. This explains why Spain had been the European economy with major employment creation in the period

from 1994 to 2007 and the one with major employment destruction since the inception of the recent economic crisis. This trend is also linked to the massive entrance of immigrant workers since the late 1990s who transformed Spain's labour market and society. The participation of the immigrant workforce rose from very low 2 per cent in the mid-1990s to 11.3 per cent (2008), nearly equally distributed among Central European, African and Latin American people (Table II).

The economic boom was accompanied by a change in central government with the conservative PP coming into office in 1996 and governing until 2004. The new government in search for legitimacy and public support, the improving economic conditions, the challenge to organise the integration into the European Currency Union and the need to repeal the remaining Labour Ordinances, inherited from the Franco regime, contributed to the re-emergence of social concertation at national level. Instead of global social pacts, the government now organised issue-centred specific agreements which facilitated the bargaining process.

The reforms of the labour market regulations in 1994 and 1997 incorporated new elements into the all too rigid Spanish collective bargaining regime. Firms in economic difficulty can agree with their works committees on "hardship clauses", which temporally allow them to implement working and pay conditions at levels lower than that set by the sectoral collective agreement. Since 1996, the main unions and the CEOE have negotiated national cross-industry framework agreements on collective bargaining. Further on, they created a tripartite National Consulting Commission for Collective Agreements (Comisión Consultiva Nacional de Convenios Colectivos) in order to observe and foment collective bargaining. In this manner, they introduced new issues such as extra-judicial mediation in industrial disputes, equal opportunities and work-life balance, early retirement (hand-over contracts), health and safety, life-long learning, bullying, disabled workers' protection, etc. into the collective bargaining agenda.

In December 1992, the first tripartite agreement on continuous training was signed, motivated by the arrival of considerable funding from the European Social Fund (Rigby, 2002). Since then, vocational and continuous training is a constant bargaining issue and trade unions and employers' organisations are important training providers. After the 1996 elections, several fundamental tripartite agreements were signed leading to the first broad consensual reform of the labour market, after those imposed in 1984, 1992 and 1994. These pacts have laid the fundamentals for the following process of social concertation and collective bargaining. Since then, social dialogue became institutionalised at national, regional and local level and the trade unions and employers' associations consider concertation as a fundamental institutional power source.

	1990	1992	1996	2000	2002	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017
Unemployment rate	16.3	18.4	22.2	14.2	13	8.6	18.3	21.6	27.2	20.9	17.2
Proportion of long-term unemployed	51.4	46.6	54.6	44.6	37.7	22.6	34.5	50	56.3	48.7	54.4
Women's unemployment rate	24.2	25.5	29.6	20.5	16.4	11	18.4	23.3	27.6	22.5	19.0
Youth unemployment rate	33	35.7	42	28.1	22.3	18.1	39.6	46.4	57.2	46.2	41.6
Unemployment rate of Spaniards	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	7.9	16.8	20.6	25.1	19.9	16.4
Unemployment rate of foreigners	nd	nd	nd	nd	nd	12.3	29.7	34.8	39.2	28.3	23.7
Proportion of fixed-term employment	30.3	33.5	33.8	32.9	31.6	30.9	25.4	25	22.1	25.7	26.5
Proportion of part-time employment	4.6	5.9	7.4	7.5	8	11.6	13.3	13.8	16	15.7	15.3
Labour force participation	49.4	48.8	49.6	53.3	54.5	58.9	59.9	60	59.7	59.4	58.8
Female labour force participation	33.3	34.2	37.2	39.8	42.3	48.9	51.6	52.9	53.4	53.7	53.3

Source: Spanish Labour Force Survey (Encuesta de Población Activa) carried out by the Spanish Statistics Office on a quarterly basis

Table II.
Structural data on
the Spanish
labour market

After a period of social conflict and discontent during the second legislature of the PP government, illustrated by the general strike against the Unemployment Security Reform Act in 2002, social concertation was re-launched with the arrival of a new socialist government in 2004. Inspired by the EU Lisbon Strategy for more and better jobs, a new stage of negotiations was initiated among the government and the social agents by the signature of a programmatic document, namely the “Declaration on Social Dialogue 2004: Competitiveness, Stable Employment and Social Cohesion”. Permanent tripartite working groups on topics such as improvement of job quality and job creation, public employment institutes, health and security, immigration, R&D and innovation, etc. were set into motion. Several reform acts on social security, gender equality, protection of dependent people, limits to subcontracting, etc. were initiated and backed by the institutionalised Social Dialogue.

This trend towards policy concertation and social dialogue is also noticeable at regional and local government levels. The general pattern at these sub-national levels follows the competitive or supply-side corporatism model negotiating social pacts for competitiveness and employment with public authorities offering budget amounts to the social agents for organisational support and employment policies. Despite this extended social dialogue practice, Spain has to be considered a weak corporatism as the contents and results of the concertation refer mainly to the state as regulator of the labour market and do not imply a real involvement of the social actors in the management of firms, industries and state agencies with some exceptions regarding training and health and safety. For trade unions, institutional participation and concertation provides a certain political influence and access to organisational resources, but no improvement in affiliation and presence at the workplace (Sánchez Mosquera, 2014). Social pacts remain politically contingent and the degree to which unions have a voice in policy making is uncertain and depends on the intentions of the governments (Hamann and Martínez Lucio, 2007).

Spain has continued to be a leader of strike action in Europe although the trend is clearly decreasing and the official figures are distorted by the effects of several political general strikes in 1988, 1992, 1994, 2002, 2010 and 2012. From a comparative perspective, it may be said that strikes form to a larger extent part of collective labour relations used quite often during collective bargaining by works committees and by union federations as a mean of pressure. The traditionally low degree of trust in management-worker relations and the high degree of inter-union competition[3] in Spain are additional factors that explain why strike rates are higher than in other EU countries. Strikes in Spain are not only a means to pressure employers but also often to pressure public authorities to develop social and worker friendly policies. Lockouts are legally restricted to situations of particularly intense conflict where company assets are in danger, and are therefore rare in Spain.

As in other countries, the trend points clearly to lower rates of industrial conflict. The last significant wave of strikes occurred between 1976 and 1979 when a political and economic crisis coincided with a regime change. Since then, a dynamic of “political exchange” between the largest workers’ and employers’ associations and the state contributed to a moderation of trade unions which public recognition, subsidies and institutional participation as compensation for their strike abstinence (Luque Balbona, 2013). The downward trend is very strong in the main industrial sectors, while the changing economic structure and union representation imply a shift towards more frequent conflicts in public and service sectors. No longer factories, but public transport, hospitals, schools and judge courts are paralysed by strikes and the mainly affected group is often not the employer but the citizen as user of these services. Frequently, the protagonists are not the large union federations but small corporatist groups such as the pilots’, bus driver’s, doctor’s, nurse’s, teacher’s, civil servant’s and judge’s associations. In this sense, the “tertiarization of conflict” threatens the hegemony of the big union confederations in those sectors and occupational groups which

maintain a considerable capacity of conflict. Labour conflict shows an inverse trend in respect to the degree of globalisation since the main industrial sectors are now disciplined by increased international competition.

After 14 years of economic and employment growth, trade unions and employer associations enjoyed high degrees of institutional embeddedness which made them rely largely on their institutional position. Institutional arrangements such as general workplace elections, automatic extension clauses of collective agreements, regional and sectoral concertation, public funding and representation in a wide range of administrative bodies reduced the need and incentives for membership mobilisation and organisational resources (Baccaro *et al.*, 2003) (Table III). However, three main challenges remained on the trade union agenda. The first of these relates to the deregulation policies of the socialist governments in the 1980s which made Spain a leader among nations with atypical employment structures. Temporary contracting, illegal work, subcontracting and the use of a myriad of contract forms continue to create a highly fragmented workforce and labour market. The second challenge was related to EU enlargement which has incorporated the central European low-wage countries and thereby converted Spain into a high-cost/low-productivity economy. The consequence of this has been the relocation of labour-intensive production facilities to the new member countries and the North-African Magreb region, a trend particularly strong in sectors such as automotive suppliers, consumer electronics and textile industries. The third challenge regarded union organisations themselves. Although they achieved social recognition and representation, the unionisation rate is currently less than 20 per cent, leaving Spain second-to-last among western European countries (only France ranks lower).

Mediterranean neoliberalism and its discontent (2010-2016)

“The crisis has exposed an unsustainable economic model that had no long-term prospects. The emperor had no clothes” (Royo, 2014, p. 1585). The burst of the real estate bubble in the context of the international financial crisis in 2008 moved the Spanish economy back to a state of chronic underdevelopment with a competitiveness deficit. The origin of the deep and long economic downturn from 2008 to 2015 lies in the economic growth model established during the latecomer industrialisation. The sectoral profile and structural weaknesses of this model still shapes the Spanish economy, limiting its recovery and growth expectations. European integration and globalisation ended some core elements of the semi-peripheral growth regime based on protected domestic markets for small local firms, periodic currency devaluation and low-cost industrial workforce, but neoliberal dominance and the absence of alternative political and social movements impede the search for a different, more sustainable and balanced development model.

Year	Members		Salaried workers		Affiliation rate (%)
	Total	Variation (%)	Total	Variation (%)	
1977	1,606,600	–	8,705,200	–	18.4
1980	1,109,900	–30.9	8,065,600	–7.3	13.7
1985	1,037,000	–6.5	7,721,500	–4.3	13.4
1990	1,561,200	+50.5	9,734,000	+26.1	16.0
1995	1,838,600	+17.7	8,412,400	–3.3	19.5
2000	2,093,500	+13.8	12,640,900	+34.3	16.6
2005	2,700,000	+28.9	15,841,600	+ 25.3	17.0
2007	3,206,000	+28.7	16,760,000	+5.8	19.1
2010	2,894,200	–9.7	15,346,800	–8.4	18.9
2012	2,576,600	–19.9	14,723,700	–4.1	17.5

Table III.
Trade union
membership and
wage-earning
population (1977-2012)

Source: Roca Martínez (2016, p. 22)

Private enterprise and household debt reached nearly 300 per cent of GDP which had to be refinanced in international credit markets. The public deficit sharply increased due to the intrusion of tax revenues and increased social spending, the inflated construction and housing sector crashed, savings banks, which had financed the bubble, had to be rescued and converted into private banks with large amounts of public money, and unemployment rose to over 20 per cent including a youth unemployment rate near to 50 per cent. The “troika”-led (IMF, European Commission, European Central Bank) neoliberal crisis management pushed further deregulation of the labour market, pension cuts, reduction of public services, privatisations and downsizing of the public sector, etc. All this intensified the social damage of the crisis without tackling the structural problems of the Spanish economy.

During the crisis years 2008-2014, the GDP shrank 9.3 per cent, Spain lost nearly 18 per cent of its employment and became the Eurozone country with the highest income inequality, unemployment and youth unemployment rates. The remittances of Spanish emigrants, a phenomenon related to the 1960s, have grown again up to \$10 million in 2014 (World Bank data), financing mainly the mortgage debts of their families at home.

Spain's economy depends on a few strongholds, mainly the tourist sector (benefitting from social and political turbulence in other Mediterranean countries), the automotive, chemistry, food and beverages industries under the control of foreign multinationals and the commercial sector. The few large Spanish multinationals, such as the banks Santander and BBVA, privatised companies of the telecommunication and energy sectors (Telefónica, Iberdrola, Repsol) and the construction groups (OHL, Sacyr, Ferrovial, ACS), operate mainly in Latin America. Others such as Endesa (acquired by Italy's Enel) or Iberia (merged with British Airways) have become part of larger foreign transnational corporations. In the European context, Spain may be considered a peripheral economy lacking strong European companies and dominated by small local firms and subsidiaries of foreign multinational companies.

Since 2015, after seven years of depression, a new optimistic discourse emerged with Spain moving out of the crisis and creating jobs. These more favourable statistics, however, are the result of exceptional external factors and indicate by no way the reduction of its huge structural deficits. First of all, the growth rates are relatively higher as Spain had shrunk much more than the rest of Europe during the crisis years. The expansive policy of the European Central Bank and the low interest rates make the refinancing of the still huge private and public debt easier. The fall of the oil price and the depreciation of the € benefitted the export sector and the trade balance. All these factors also stimulated a modest recovery of domestic demand. The majority of new jobs are part-time and fixed-term contracts while Spain continues to destroy stable employment and the long-term unemployed are increasing.

In the past, Spain benefitted from several exceptional contextual conditions such as the adhesion to the EEC or the artificial financial and real estate bubble (1994-2007) with inflows of low-interest money, foreign capital investments and European social and structural funds. However, as part of the Eurozone and after the EU enlargement towards central and eastern Europe, these exceptional context conditions have disappeared and there are no substitutes in sight. Spain thus seems to be condemned to suffer its structural economic weaknesses for a long period and so far, no deliberate political alternatives seem able to initiate a change of the outdated economic model.

During the bubble a contradictory mode of regulation had been established combining neoliberal deregulation and privatisation policies with social democratic welfare and social services measures. This balance between two contradictory dynamics was possible for a time because of favourable international conditions, the influx from external resources and the employment growth (Banyuls and Recio, 2015). Bipartite and tripartite

macro-concertation was part of this social democrat dynamic which shows similarities to Rhodes' (1998) concept of "competitive corporatism" and Traxlers' (2001) "supply-side corporatism". This adapted form of corporatism replaces the initial forms of political exchange by the general acceptance of the pressures of global competition maintaining the corporatist bargaining networks (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014). The crisis not only ended with the speculative economic growth model but also with the social democratic dynamic of implementing social welfare and public service institutions in a country that only recently began to build up a still underdeveloped modern welfare state. In the context of the Troika-led neoliberal regulation model in Europe, the conservative political and economic elites in Spain took the opportunity to establish a neoliberal-conservative regime.

Reforms in the education system introduced more selective and elitist evaluation methods, strengthened the role of the Catholic Church and reduced the resources for public schools and universities. Health care budgets were reduced, hospitals privatised, undocumented immigrants expelled from the universal health care system, the co-payment for medicines and prostheses extended and the dependency benefits for elderly and disabled people reduced. The socialist (2011) and conservative (2013) governments enacted two pension reform acts, rising the statutory retirement age from 65 to 67 and implementing a long-term reduction of pension benefits. The most illustrative example for the neoconservative authoritarian character of recent policies in Spain is the Law on Public Security (2015), commonly known as the "Ley Mordaza" (Gag Law), which punishes, with exorbitant fines, unauthorised demonstrations, insulting state institutions and symbols, occupation of public squares and buildings and photographing security forces (among many other offences). At the same time, it authorises private security services with police authority. The Law is a reaction to the growing social protest movements against the neoliberal crisis management.

Regarding IR, the cutbacks of labour rights and weakening of collective bargaining are of critical relevance. The Labour Reform Act 2012 reduced employment protection and severance pay, facilitated individual and collective dismissals, gave priority to company agreements over multi-employer agreements, established the unilateral right to opt out from collective agreements by the employer and abolished the standard that guaranteed the maintenance of collective agreements until the renegotiation of new ones. Employers are thus encouraged to leave collective bargaining. IR is become highly fragmented, the wage gap and diversity of working conditions has increased and the traditionally high collective bargaining coverage has fallen drastically. Although the reform strengthens the trade union bodies, namely the trade union sections and the health and safety committees, at firm level to the detriment of the unitary representation bodies (works committees), the general trend shows a clear shift in the power relations in favour of the individual employer (Escudero Rodríguez, 2014).

Under these circumstances, two collectives have grown dramatically, the "working poor" with wages below the poverty threshold, and the long-term unemployed, with no right for unemployment benefits and with means-tested minimum pay of €425 per month as the only income.

Since the outbreak of the crisis, Spain is moving towards a new mode of regulation which may be labelled semi-peripheral neoliberalism. The corporatist arrangements which had distributed the benefits of the speculative bubble were rendered inoperative in the management of the crisis. Tripartite social concertation was abandoned, public subsidies for trade unions and other social organisations reduced and the already underdeveloped welfare system further downsized. As a consequence inequality, poverty, social exclusion and discrimination rose and the social unrest is contested by authoritarian repression.

The trade unions lost their main power source of the past decades. Specifically, this comprised widespread institutional participation combined with social concertation and

collective bargaining. Their traditional protest repertoires, namely the general strikes against the labour market reforms 2010 and 2012, have lost their effectiveness and could not stop the neoliberal project. Following the power sources approach (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013), Spanish trade unions have lost structural power in the internal and external labour markets due to high unemployment and constant company restructuring and downsizing. Even in highly unionised sectors such as the automotive or steel industries, works councils and unions had to make significant concessions in terms of wage cuts, working time and contract flexibility to safeguard employment and avoid relocations. Shrinking membership and bargaining power weakens the associative and organisational power sources and the conservative political climate, together with the power shift towards employers, undermine the institutional power and willingness to maintain effective concertation and social dialogue.

In this defensive situation, revitalisation strategies through the mobilisation of complementary power sources in terms of social movement unionism, alliances with other civic movements and an ideological and organisational renewal towards a recovered “sword of social justice” emerge on the agenda. However, they face high barriers of conservative inertia and risk-avoidance strategies. Moral, coalition and strategic power sources are very difficult to mobilise for trade unions after decades of nearly exclusive orientation towards institutional power and representative forms of collective action. So far, as Gago (2012) says, the Spanish unions represent the image of a captain who refuses to abandon the sinking ship of “concertation” (p. 1100).

With trade unions and left-wing parties weakened and delegitimised, new social protest movements emerged as the only visible opposition against the conservative neoliberal project. The most prominent among the new social protest movements was the “Indignados” (outraged) movement, which emerged in 2011 occupying during several months all central squares of Spain’s cities practicing innovative forms of direct grassroots democracy. The movement has then dispersed in various local initiatives and civic organisations and some concrete collectives such as the Platform Against Evictions, protecting many families threatened with eviction due to their inability to pay their mortgage.

In 2014, a new political party “Podemos” (We Can) was formed out of these protest groups, which in a few months caught up with the shrinking Socialist Party achieving around 20 per cent of the votes in general elections and governing the two major cities Madrid and Barcelona. Podemos contributed decisively to ending the bipartite (PSOE and PP) hegemony and to the political fragmentation in the current Spanish political landscape. In all these movements, several small and local unions such as the Andalusian Workers’ Union SAT or the Asturian Left-wing Union CSI are very active, while the two larger union confederations are absent and considered by these groups as part of the corrupt political system. The involvement of union leaders in corruption scandals, concerning the management of training funds and early retirement schemes or the participation in illegal practices of the savings banks, fostered a negative image of unions.

The only new social movement with considerable trade union participation are the “Civic Tides” fighting against the cutbacks and privatisations in the public education, research, health care and social service sectors. Although unable to invert the general trend of downsizing the public services, they achieved some important victories such as the withdrawal of public hospital privatisation plans in Madrid in 2013. However, the shared interest in defending public services is not enough for approaching trade unions and new social movements towards a broad anti-neoliberal opposition or a revitalised “social movement unionism”.

It is interesting to consider the ongoing debate on the continuity of corporatism under new conditions – from “social corporatism” to “competitive corporatism” to “crisis corporatism” (González Begega and Luque Balbona, 2014; Molina and Miguélez, 2013). The bipartite social

dialogue between the two weakened social agents continues to produce agreements, whereas tripartite concertation has been widely abandoned. The social partners try to save multi-employer collective bargaining against the neoliberal attacks of the government to privilege the unilateral regulatory capacity of the individual employer. Trade unions and employers' associations have been delegitimised as political actors by the government, following the directives of the market and the Troika, and by the public and the new protest movements, considering them as jointly responsible of the crisis and the ensuing social damage. The Spanish state, for its part, is losing its regulatory capacity abandoning its function as coordinator of social dialogue and tripartite agreements. This has deepened its own incoherence and thus the political and economic fragmentation of the institutional system (Martínez Lucio, 2016).

Conclusions

Spain is suffering from a bankrupt economic model and a contradictory and dysfunctional institutional system without any expectation of change. The Fordist structures that emerged in the industrialisation process during the 1960s have been widely eroded without any alternative economic model in sight. Although there are important social protest movements against the conservative neoliberal policies, these remain limited to specific issues such as privatisation of hospitals, evictions or attacks on abortion rights and have been unable to present a clear alternative. The newly emerging political parties and the regional independence movements contribute to a political instability and ongoing disaffection of large sectors of the population towards the political class marked by continuous waves of corruption scandals at all levels.

The economic and political crisis affects the entire institutional structure including IR. Neoliberal crisis management has shifted the balance of power between capital and labour in favour of the individual employer. Trade unions, labour rights and collective bargaining have been weakened. High unemployment, the high level of precarious employment and the competitive pressures of a currency union, which leaves labour costs as the main adjustment mechanism, make collective action in defence of labour even more difficult. Trade unions find themselves in a delicate situation having lost significant degrees of their structural power in the deregulated labour market, and of their institutional power as a social agent in concertation arrangements. Additionally, several corruption scandals undermine their moral power and the new protest movements identify them with the corrupt and delegitimised political class. Lacking sufficient autonomous strategic power sources, they are awaiting changes to the economic and political context to recover lost ground.

Regarding the theoretical debate on corporatism as a governance mode involving private interest organisations, the Spanish case provides ambiguous results. The lack of a coherent institutional system and efficient political administration limits the effectiveness of corporatist arrangements and reduces them to contingent concertation strategies. These depend on the political will to offer resources for a political exchange among social agents and the government, a disposition that is fading away under conditions of shrinking resources and the pressure towards neoliberal reforms. As Culpepper and Regan (2014, p. 723) point out, governments no longer require unions because they have lost the capacity "either to threaten governments with the stick of protest or to seduce policymakers with the carrot of problem-solving". On the other hand, the continuity of bipartite social dialogue between the major trade unions and employer associations points to a shared interest of mutual recognition, legitimacy, stable bargaining arrangements and organisational resources.

Spain confirms that IR still largely depends on the national specific variety of capitalism that conditions economic development and resources for political exchange.

Internationalisation of IR lags clearly behind the economic internationalisation and thus suffers shrinking regulatory power. Nevertheless, there remains always considerable room for manoeuvre.

Notes

1. The medium size of Spanish firms remains at a very low level till today with 4.9 employees and more than 30 per cent of the workforce belongs to micro-enterprises (less than 10 employees) (Círculo de Empresarios, 2015).
2. Joseph Foweraker (1987) considers corporatism as a government strategy to co-opt labour and civil society organisations even present in the Francoist OSE in the early 1960s when workers' commission delegates entered the firm-level representation bodies.
3. In the Basque Country, e.g., ELA often goes for strikes playing out its strike fund against the other unions who do not offer any strike pay to their members.

References

- Alonso, L.E. (1991), "Conflicto laboral y cambio social. Una aproximación al caso español", in Miguélez, F. and Prieto, C. (Eds), *Las relaciones laborales en España, Siglo XXI*, Madrid, pp. 403-423.
- Babiano, J. (1993), "Las peculiaridades del fordismo español", *Cuadernos de Relaciones Laborales*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 77-94.
- Baccaro, L., Hamann, K. and Turner, L. (2003), "The politics of labour movement revitalization, the need for a revitalized perspective", *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 119-133.
- Baglioni, G. (1987), "Constants and variants in political exchange", *Labour*, Vol. 1 No. 3, pp. 57-94.
- Banyuls, J. and Recio, A. (2015), "A crisis within the crisis – Spain under the regime of a conservative neoliberalism", in Lehndorff, S. (Ed.), *Divisive Integration – The Triumph of Failed Ideas Revisited*, ETUI, Brussels, pp. 39-68.
- Banyuls, J., Miguélez, F., Recio, A., Cano, E. and Lorente, R. (2009), "The transformation of the employment system in Spain, towards a mediterranean neoliberalism?", in Bosch, G., Lehndorff, S. and Rubery, J. (Eds), *European Employment Models in Flux*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 247-269.
- Barrio Alonso, Á. (2014), *Por la razón y el derecho. Historia de la negociación colectiva en España (1850-2012)*, Comares and Granada.
- Boyer, R. and Saillard, Y. (Eds) (2002), *Régulation Theory. The State of the Art*, Routledge, London and New York, NY.
- Círculo de Empresarios (2015), *La empresa mediana española*, Informe anual 2015, Madrid.
- Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) (2012), "Informe de elecciones sindicales", Secretaría de Organización, Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras, ABC-Economía, Madrid, 18 December 2015.
- Crouch, C. (1993), *Industrial Relations and European State Traditions*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Crozier, M. and Friedberg, E. (1980), *Actors and Systems: The Politics of Collective Action*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Culpepper, P.D. and Regan, A. (2014), "Why don't governments need trade unions anymore? The death of social pacts in Ireland and Italy", *Socio-Economic Review*, Vol. 12 No. 4, pp. 723-745.
- Domènech Sampere, X. (2003), "La otra cara del milagro español. Clase obrera y movimiento obrero en los años del desarrollismo", *Historia Contemporánea*, Vol. 16 No. 26, pp. 91-112.
- Escudero Rodríguez, R. (2014), "La representación de los trabajadores en los centros de trabajo", in García Murcia, J. (Ed.), *El sistema de relaciones laborales a la altura del siglo XXI*, Consejería de Economía y Empleo del Principado de Asturias, Oviedo, pp. 15-35.
- Foweraker, J.W. (1987), "The role of labor organizations in the transition to democracy in Spain", in Clark, R.P. and Haltzel, M.H. (Eds), *Spain in the 1980s*, Ballinger, Cambridge, MA, pp. 97-122.

- Gago, A. (2012), "Los sindicatos mayoritarios CCOO y UGT ante la crisis económica, Declive o revitalización?", *Anuario del Conflicto Social 2012*, pp. 1075-1104.
- Giddens, A. (1984), *Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giner, S. (1985), "Political economy, legitimation and the state in Southern Europe", in Hudson, R. and Lewis, J. (Eds), *Uneven Development in Southern Europe*, Methuen, London and New York, NY, pp. 309-350.
- Giner, S. and Sevilla, E. (1980), "From despotism to parliamentarism: class domination and political order in the Spanish state", in Scase, R. (Ed.), *The State in Western Europe*, Croom Helm, London, pp. 197-229.
- González Begega, S. and Luque Balbona, D. (2014), "Adios al corporatismo competitivo en España? Pactos sociales y conflicto en la crisis económica", *Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, Vol. 36 No. 148, pp. 79-102.
- Grahl, J. and Teague, P. (2000), "The regulation school, the employment relation and financialization", *Economy and Society*, Vol. 29 No. 1, pp. 160-178.
- Gumbrell-McCormick, R. and Hyman, R. (2013), *Trade Unions in Western Europe. Hard Times, Hard Choices*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hamann, K. and Martínez Lucio, M. (2007), "Trade union revitalisation in Spain", in Phelan, C. (Ed.), *Trade Union Revitalisation*, Peter Lang, Oxford, pp. 199-212.
- Holman, O. (1988), "Semiperipheral fordism in Southern Europe", *International Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 11-55.
- Hyman, R. (1994), "Theory and industrial relations", *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 165-180.
- Lehmbruch, G. (1984), "Concertation and the structure of corporatist networks", in Goldthorpe, J. (Ed.), *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 60-80.
- Luque Balbona, D. (2013), *Las huelgas en España. 1905-2010*, Germania, Valencia.
- Martín Valverde, A. (1991), *European Employment and Industrial Relations Glossary, Spain*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions.
- Martínez Lucio, M. (1992), "Spain, constructing institutions and actors in a context of change", in Ferner, A. and Hyman, R. (Eds), *Industrial Relations in the New Europe*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, pp. 482-523.
- Martínez Lucio, M. (1998), "Spain, regulating employment and social fragmentation", in Ferner, A. and Hyman, R. (Eds), *Changing Industrial Relations in Europe*, 2nd ed., Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, pp. 426-458.
- Martínez Lucio, M. (2016), "Incertidumbre, indecisión y neoliberalismo emergente. El papel dual y complejo del Estado español en las relaciones laborales", *Sociología del Trabajo*, Vol. 29 No. 87, pp. 68-88.
- Molina, O. and Miguélez, F. (2013), "From negotiation to imposition, social dialogue in austerity times in Spain", Working Paper No. 51, ILO, Geneva.
- Nonell, R., Medina, I. and Molins, J.M. (2011), "Social pacts and the institutionalization of social partners. The case of Spanish employers' associations", in Baglioni, M. and Brandl, B. (Eds), *Changing Labour Relations: Between Path Dependency and Global Trends*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, pp. 85-110.
- Oliet, A. (2004), *La Concertación Social en la Democracia Española*, Tirant Lo Blanc, Valencia.
- Pérez Yruela, M. and Giner, S. (Eds) (1988), *El Corporatismo en España*, Ariel, Barcelona.
- Pizzorno, A. (1978), "Political exchange and collective identity in industrial conflict", in Crouch, C. and Pizzorno, A. (Eds), *The Resurgence of Class Conflict in Western Europe Since 1968*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, pp. 277-298.

- Regini, M. (1984), "The conditions for political exchange: how concertation emerged and collapsed in Italy and Great Britain", in Goldthorpe, J. (Ed.), *Order and Conflict in Contemporary Capitalism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pp. 124-142.
- Regini, M. (1986), "Political bargaining in Western Europe during the economic crisis of the 1980s", in Jacobi, O., Jessop, B., Kastendiek, H. and Regini, M. (Eds), *Economic Crisis, Trade Unions and The State*, Croom Helm, London, pp. 61-76.
- Rhodes, M. (1998), "Globalization, labour markets and welfare states: a future of 'competitive corporatism'?", in Rhodes, M. and Meny, Y. (Eds), *The Future of European Welfare: A New Social Contract*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, pp. 178-203.
- Rigby, M. (2002), "Spanish trade unions and the provision of continuous training", *Employee Relations*, Vol. 24 No. 5, pp. 500-515.
- Roca Jusmet, J. (1991), "La concertación social", in Miguélez, F. and Prieto, C. (Eds), *Las relaciones laborales en España, Siglo XXI*, Madrid, pp. 361-377.
- Roca Martínez, B. (2016), "Transformaciones en el trabajo y movimiento sindical. Propuestas para una renovación necesaria", Doc. 86/2016, Fundación Alternativas, Madrid.
- Royo, S. (2002), *A New Century of Corporatism? Corporatism in Southern Europe*, Praeger, Westport, CT.
- Royo, S. (2014), "Institutional degeneration and the economic crisis in Spain", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 58 No. 12, pp. 1568-1591.
- Sánchez Mosquera, M. (2014), "Los sindicatos más representativos en la concertación social en Andalucía, 1993-2012", *Revista de Estudios Regionales*, Vol. 37 No. 99, pp. 155-181.
- Solé, C. (1990), "La recesión del neocorporatismo en España", *Papers*, Vol. 17 No. 33, pp. 51-63.
- Streeck, W. and Schmitter, P.C. (1985), *Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State*, Sage, London.
- Traxler, F. (2001), "Die Metamorphosen des Korporatismus: vom klassischen zum schlanken Muster", *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, Vol. 42 No. 4, pp. 590-623.
- Van Waarden, F. (1995), "Government intervention in industrial relations", in Van Ruysseveldt, J., Huiskamp, R. and van Hoof, J. (Eds), *Comparative Industrial and Employment Relations*, Sage, London, pp. 109-133.
- Zaragoza, A. (Ed.) (1988), *Pactos sociales, sindicatos y patronal en España, Siglo XXI*, Madrid.

Further reading

- Banyuls, J. and Miguélez, F. (2015), "A crisis inside the crisis, Spain under a conservative neoliberalism", in Lehdorff, S. (Ed.), *Divisive Integration – The Triumph of Failed Ideas Revisited*, ETUI, Brussels, pp. 39-68.
- López, I. and Rodríguez, E. (2011), "The Spanish model", *New Left Review*, Vol. 69, pp. 5-28.
- Visser, J. (1998), "The Europeanisation of trade unions", in Pasture, P. and Verberckmoes, J. (Eds), *Working-Class Internationalism and the Appeal of National Identity*, Berg, Oxford, pp. 231-257.

Corresponding author

Holm-Detlev Köhler can be contacted at: hkohler@uniovi.es

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com