

Crossing the divide: New forms of collective solidarity and workers' organisations in Africa

Carmen Ludwig

Carmen Ludwig: carmen.ludwig@sowi.uni-giessen.de

The presentation will explore the ambiguity and heterogeneity of class and the formation of new forms of collective solidarity of precarious and informal workers in Africa. Based on current research projects, insights will be presented on the emergence of “hybrid” organisations which seek to cross the bridge between traditional unionism and informal workers' associations or cooperatives and which are increasingly learning to assess where the power of informal and precarious workers resides.

Conceptualising the distinctive character of Petty Commodity Production in Mining

Hibist Kassa

Hibist Kassa: hibist.kassa@wits.ac.za

Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining (ASM) exists along a spectrum within which petty commodity producers and petty capitalists operate at the lower end. A global expansion of ASM was fuelled by structural adjustment reforms, high unemployment, a minerals commodity boom and a consequent decline in small holder agriculture. The presentation is based on a study that traces the evolution of petty commodity production and petty capitalism in gold mining in Ghana and South Africa and compares their contemporary formations. The presentation outlines the theoretical approach that was elaborated to investigate the evolution of petty commodity production. The central argument is that even though petty commodity production and petty capitalism operate in dominant, large-scale mining, they can represent a counter movement to big capital. This stems from endogenous factors which shape its evolution.

Union Transformation through Organisation of Informal Workers – A Case Study of Ugandan Transport Workers

Dave Spooner

Dave Spooner: dave.spooner@global-labour.net

In many countries, especially in the global South, formerly large and powerful unions of transport workers have lost membership and power through the informalisation of transport services. One such union, the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union (ATGWU) in Uganda, recognised that radical changes were needed to re-orientate its structures, organising strategies and policies towards the organisation and representation of the informal transport workforce. This included a change of thinking in the role of the union in collective bargaining, from a simple employee-employer relationship to the representation of workers in a variety of employment relationships, including self-employment and casual employment in the context of an informal economy. Through engagement and negotiations with informal workers' associations, the union grew from less than 5,000 members to 100,000 members in just five years and discovered new forms of union power.