

PhD POLITICAL STUDIES SEMINAR SERIES

Welfare and Public Policies Series (WPPS)

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*Unions Matter:
The New Logic of Collective Action in the 21st Century*

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ROOM B

NASP GRADUATE SCHOOL

VIA PACE, 10 – MILAN

Abstract

Since the 1980s, trade unions have consented to the dualization of labour markets and welfare states, thereby creating a wedge between entrenched 'insiders' in core industries and precarious 'outsiders' at the periphery. However, recent evidence shows that unions occasionally embrace the interests of the most vulnerable segments. Combining an original theoretical framework with cross-country comparative evidence and two illustrative case studies, this article conceptualizes the 'new logic of collective action' in advanced capitalist economies. It proposes a three-step argument: after consenting to dualization in the 1980s-1990s, the expansion of the labour market periphery has undermined their organization, collective bargaining capacity, and public legitimacy. This has gradually spurred unions to turn (back) to solidarity, adopting context-sensitive strategies to protect outsiders. Unions may find it profitable to push for expanding welfare states in flexible labour markets (embedded flexibilization) or re-regulating employment in dualized welfare states.

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