Toronto’s ‘Post-Fordism’? Labour, Austerity, and the New Urban Populism

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Labour, Populism, and Austerity: Enabling Dissent in the City

• Populism rising in various forms globally
• Links to austerity, both implementation and resistance
• Debates around its roles and centrality in current neoliberal agendas.
• Populism is reconstituted through the city (Kipfer and Saberi 2014)
• Labour is active in these processes of the populist austerity agenda (contesting, reshaping, etc)
• *Labour’s ‘Enabling Dissent’* - a classed expression of urban dissent that only partially contests austerity-right populism
Three Processes

• *Austerity* - policies and practices of neoliberal governments in the years following the 2008 financial crisis

• *Populism* - an approach to politics that includes broad appeals to the interests of ‘the people’ and the threats created by the dangerous ‘other’ (often ‘elites’, particularly those with an institutional basis)

• *Crisis of labour* – stemming from the reorganization of capitalism on a global scale that began in the 1970s
The Rise of Ford Nation: Derailing the ‘Gravy Train’

- Attacks on public sector workers and services
- Reaction to the exclusionary practices of a re-financialized downtown core
- Contradicts a ‘cosmopolitan elitism’ that has, in part, driven contemporary urban dispossession and accumulation
- Such sentiments are ‘extra-urban’ with roots in Toronto’s amalgamation of the late 1990s
Table 1: Private Public Sector Divides  
Toronto CMA, 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Public</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Hourly Wage ($)</strong></td>
<td>23.11</td>
<td>30.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% University Degree</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>52.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Union coverage</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>61.7</td>
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Source: Toronto Industry Profiles 2013
Labour Contesting Ford-ism

Garbage Collection Privatization

- Unpopular 39 day city worker strike in summer of 2009
- Banked sick days an issue
- Contracting out garbage collection 2010 campaign issue
- West of Yonge contracts in place by 2011
- Privatized garbage collection begins August 2012
- Tory promised east of Yonge subcontracting in 2014
Labour Contesting Ford-ism

Subcontracting cleaners
- Fords wish to subcontract everything that ‘wasn’t nailed down’
- Over 1000 city $22+/hr cleaning jobs at risk
- April 2012 Council voted to limit contracting out powers of city staff

“...just my personal opinion, we shouldn’t be paying cleaners $22 an hour”
– Doug Ford, Toronto City Councilor
Labour Contesting Ford-ism

Library Strike

- Campaign against 10% budget cuts and closures in 2011/2012
- Positioned libraries as economically important
- 10-day strike against precarious work in March 2012

“I’ve got more libraries in my area than I have Tim Hortons”
– Doug Ford, Toronto City Councilor
Discussion: Post-Ford-ism and the Legacy for Labour Politics in Toronto

Three possible trajectories for ‘Post-Ford’ labour

1. ‘Enabling dissent’
2. Urban coalitions
3. Left populist social movements
Conclusions

- Socio-geography of labour has to start considering broader political and social processes beyond just collective bargaining and traditional organizing.

- Organized labour must take on a class-based rather than sectionalist orientation.

- Methodological urbanism is just as limited as methodological nationalism for labour geographers.

- Populism has its own limits (politically and conceptually).