

The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science

<http://ann.sagepub.com>

Resistance and Compliance in the Age of Globalization: Indian Women and Labor Organizations

Rina Agarwala

The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 2007; 610; 143

DOI: 10.1177/0002716206297520

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/610/1/143>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



American Academy of Political and Social Science

Additional services and information for *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://ann.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations (this article cites 7 articles hosted on the SAGE Journals Online and HighWire Press platforms):
<http://ann.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/610/1/143>

Resistance and Compliance in the Age of Globalization: Indian Women and Labor Organizations

By
RINA AGARWALA

This article summarizes findings obtained through ethnographic research conducted in three states in India between 2002 and 2004. On the basis of interviews with more than three hundred labor leaders, government officials, and working women, the author reports on the efforts of informal workers in construction and tobacco manufacturing to organize and improve their conditions of life. Contrary to mobilizations in the formal sector, those workers do not make direct demands on their employers. Instead they appeal to the state to obtain welfare benefits. The study shows that neoliberal reform has surprisingly opened up new channels for informal workers to constitute themselves as a class. This represents an amendment to earlier analyses that focused exclusively on the mobilizing capacity of workers in the formal sector. The author concludes by highlighting the importance of this work for the study of social movements and labor's relationship with the state.

Keywords: India; neoliberal reform; informal economy; labor-state relations

Although the geographic focus of my research is far from Latin America, the questions that motivate it and the findings that arise from it resonate all too well with the other articles in this volume. My study examines the changing relationship between the state and labor as countries throughout the world liberalize their economies and integrate with one another and the percentage of people living in perpetual insecurity—that is, informal workers, who by

Rina Agarwala is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Johns Hopkins University. Her research interests include labor, gender, globalization, international development, and migration. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology and demography from Princeton University, a master's in public policy in political and economic development from Harvard University, and a BA in economics and government from Cornell University. She has worked at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in China, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, and Women's World Banking (WWB) in New York. She may be contacted via e-mail at agarwala@jhu.edu.

DOI: 10.1177/0002716206297520

definition receive no guaranteed benefits from either an employer or a state—increases.

For decades, rich and poor countries have organized around a model that held the state responsible for ensuring workers' security and basic needs. In return, workers provided their labor without strife. Although states varied in the degree of protection promised and ultimately provided, the basic contract remained consistent across nations. Since the 1980s, however, a new economic and political model has emerged and begun to proliferate. States and firms are increasingly seeking economic expansion through competition in a global marketplace. To survive the competition, firms face (or at least claim to face) mounting pressures to reduce labor costs by hiring informal workers who, by definition, are *not* protected by state law. States support companies in their decision to use unprotected labor by (among other efforts) initiating incentive programs that encourage formally protected workers to leave their jobs, creating free trade zones where firms are not held to labor laws, and contracting public sector services to private sector firms that can hire informally. As opportunities in the formal sector diminish, a growing proportion of household members are forced to engage in informal employment. These trends have altered normative roles of both workers and the state, thereby changing the relationship between the two. State governments portray informal workers as the ideal worker, although they operate outside state regulation; multilateral institutions and the public media tag states that retreat from their welfare functions toward workers as modern and efficient.

A burgeoning literature about globalization and labor has begun to analyze this new relationship between the state and workers. Many scholars argue that economic reforms that encourage free trade, increased capital and labor mobility, and heightened global competition (often combined under the common rubric of "neoliberalism") have pushed labor movements into a crisis characterized by declining union density and a diminishing ability of workers to influence the state (Castells 1997; Tilly 1995, Western 1995). Although scholars have extensively written about the important role organized workers have played in shaping transformative events, modern societies, and institutions (Collier and Collier 1991; Heller 1999; Moore 1966; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Thompson 1966; Tilly 1978), recent media coverage has celebrated the supposed crisis by showing a growing skepticism about the intentions and the ability of workers' movements to improve people's living conditions. In response to the massive international outpouring of resistance to economic reforms by organized workers in France, Germany, Austria, Britain, India, and the United States during the spring of 2003, for example, *The Economist* magazine warned, "Do not be fooled by events in Europe this week. . . . Unions everywhere are in decline, and to a large extent they deserve to be" ("Adapt or Die" 2003, 13).

Some scholars claim that as a result of these trends, workers are no longer organizing as a class to improve their situation, and state governments are increasingly abandoning their responsibility for ensuring the welfare of labor. Based on

these claims, a consensus is beginning to emerge in academic theory that class analytics may be losing its significance as a tool with which to explain the differentiation of life chances among interdependent economic actors, as well as the political dynamics that follow from such inequities.

If scholars of the recent globalization and labor literature are correct, what strategies are people using (if not class struggle) to improve their livelihoods when they are increasingly unattached to a single employer and are operating outside the state's jurisdiction? What role is the state playing in managing its conflicting constituencies as its primary economic goal enables increased capitalist exploitation through the isolation of workers from employers and government legislation? Given the empirical evidence across time, geography, and industry showing that workers organize to protect their livelihoods during economic busts and booms, is it reasonable to assume that alterations in structures of production can undermine all struggles motivated by economic relations?

[R]ecent media coverage has celebrated the supposed crisis by showing a growing skepticism about the intentions and the ability of workers' movements to improve people's living conditions.

To address these questions, I conducted 340 in-depth interviews with informal workers, government officials, and union leaders to examine how workers in India are responding to their changing circumstances. After building a relatively closed, state-planned economy for four decades, India began liberalizing for the first time in 1991. Reforms were conducted against the backdrop of India's formal democratic system, which ensures equal rights under constitutional law and has existed for nearly sixty years.¹ Although some have argued that democracy has not yet reached all Indian citizens at the deepest level, the nation's large and vibrant civic and political life is undeniable. India has long been recognized by scholars and activists for bearing a strong workers' movement, as well as holding the longest-running, democratically elected Communist Party in power (at the state government level). Today, however, 93 percent of the country's labor force (82 percent of its nonagricultural workers) is employed in the informal sector; by most accounts, this percentage is growing as a result of the 1991 reforms (National Sample Survey Organisation [NSSO] 2001).

By contrast to the skepticism shown in recent scholarship and press toward the power of workers' movements, my study revives scholars' earlier understanding of their importance. Based on my interviews, I analyze (1) how the informal nature of employment shapes workers' collective action strategies in India and (2) the conditions under which informal workers' organizations succeed or fail in attaining material benefits for their members. Specifically, this study attempts to better understand the role of workers in shaping the current phase of economic and political transitions by taking an in-depth look at informal workers' organizing strategies and their interactions with the state.

An Overlooked Field: The Informal Sector

The informal sector consists of economic units that produce legal goods and services but in operations that are not registered or regulated by fiscal, labor, health, and tax laws.² Thus, the primary difference between informal and formal workers is that the latter are protected and held accountable by state legislation while the former are not (Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989). Informal workers include the self-employed (such as street vendors or trash pickers), employees in informal enterprises, and casual labor or contractors who work for formal enterprises through subcontractors. Self-employed workers include those who hire or do not hire employees. Informal workers may labor at home, on an employer's location, or in a third site, such as a subcontractor's workshop.

Few scholars have examined informal workers' organizing strategies in much depth. Students of class politics have often argued that informal workers cannot organize along class lines due to the nature of their employment. Informality disperses production through home-based work, complicates employer-employee relationships through multiple subcontracting arrangements, and atomizes labor relationships by eliminating the daily shop floor gathering of workers. Implicit in these arguments is that informal workers are an expression of what Karl Marx (1906) called "the reserve army of labor"—that is, those who perform odd jobs while waiting to be formally employed. In other words, only once informal workers are formally employed, so the argument goes, will they become an integral part of the workforce and join the labor struggle (Bairoch 1973; Geertz 1963; Harris and Todaro 1970; Lewis 1954; Marx 1906).

This view of the informal sector has marked the labor literature since the early 1900s, thereby limiting most studies to urban formal sector workers and, in some cases, rural peasants (Herring and Hart 1977). Even the relatively recent surge in studies on labor movements has tended to ignore the informal sector, despite the increasing informalization of production structures (Burawoy 1984; Chibber 2003; Collier and Collier 1991; Deyo 1989; Fernandes 1997). The growing literature on social movements has de-emphasized movements where work status, rather than a social issue or an adscriptive characteristic, provides the primary

organizing axis (Katzenstein, Kothari, and Mehta 2001; Omvedt 1993). Here again, informal workers' organizations are not acknowledged.

The dearth of literature on informal workers and the state is particularly surprising, because the very definition of the informal sector, as economic activities that operate outside legal protection and regulation, intricately ties its workers with the government bureaucracies in a way that is starkly different from formal workers. Thus, informal workers pose an important challenge to the existing literature on the state and labor, which largely draws from the periods when workers were first beginning to organize (Badie and Birnbaum 1983; Chakrabarty 2000; Chandavarkar 1994; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987).

Part of the lack of focus on informality is explained by the minimal amount of information available. Since the term "informal sector" was first coined in the early 1970s by Keith Hart (1973), social scientists have debated its meaning and the reasons for its existence.³ Studies of informal economic activities in India focus on definition and measurement.⁴ Some projects have examined the social and political lives of informal workers (Beneria and Roldan 1987; Cross 1998; Grasmuck and Espinal 2000; Gugler 1991; Macharia 1997). These case studies, which tend to focus on Latin America and Africa, show that, contrary to the claims of the class and social movement literature, the growing numbers of informal workers are indeed organizing to improve their conditions. Nevertheless, more such studies in varying regional settings are essential to understanding the global context. The few that examine the social and political lives of informal workers in India are consistent with research showing that coordinating activities among informal workers improves their circumstances (Carr, Chen, and Jhabvala 1996; Chowdhury 2003; Sanyal 1991; Sharma and Antony 2001). Still little is known about informal workers' specific organizing strategies, and even less about the conditions needed for success in attaining state-supported benefits. Finally, almost none of the studies have connected informal workers' experiences to the theoretical literature on class politics and the state. It is along those lines that my work makes a contribution.

Summary of Findings

To explore how the informal nature of employment shapes workers' collective action strategies in India, I examined informal workers' organizations across three Indian states with varying political and economic histories. In each state, I studied movements in two industries—construction and tobacco (or *bidi*)—whose conditions of work vary enormously. The findings from this portion of the study illustrate that informal workers, like formal workers, organize along class lines to improve their livelihoods. Nevertheless, while state-sanctioned alterations in structures of production may have undermined formal workers' movements, the same alterations have forced informal workers to seek new and different collective action strategies.

Since the mid-1980s, Indian informal workers in both construction and bidi have launched a labor movement that, on one hand, accommodates unprotected, flexible production structures and, on the other hand, fights for new sources of protection for the working poor. Rather than making work-related demands, such as minimum wages and job security, on employers (as formal sector workers have done in the past), informal workers have focused on making welfare demands on the state. Their actions have led to the industry-specific welfare boards for informal workers. Employers, governments, and workers fund the boards, and in return for membership, workers are supposed to receive benefits such as education scholarships for their children, housing allowances, health care, pensions, and marriage grants. Regional state governments are responsible for implementing such boards, and informal workers' unions are actively involved in holding the government accountable. In addition, informal workers are forcing the state to acknowledge their status as legitimate workers, even when employers will not. The state's acknowledgement of worker status has been instituted through the provision of a state-certified identity card to informal workers. Interviewees across the three states and two industries emphasized that the identity card enabled them to be viewed as legitimate and worthy citizens when they made demands in their children's schools, municipal offices, and even against police harassment. Finally, by definition, informal workers frequently change employers. Therefore, informal workers organize around the neighborhood, rather than the shop floor. In return for state-provided welfare benefits and identity cards, they enter an implicit contract by providing low cost, flexible labor to employers on an unregulated, insecure basis.

*[B]y definition, informal workers frequently
change employers. Therefore, informal workers
organize around the neighborhood,
rather than the shop floor.*

By incorporating these findings into existing models of how workers in a particular class location (as a class-in-themselves) mobilize to pursue their interests (as a class-for-themselves), I offer support for a reformulated labor movement model. Unlike the traditional labor movement models that focused primarily on the relationship between employers and the minority of workers who have already won formal rights from the state, the revised model aims to help scholars understand forms of class-based exploitation and resistance in the swelling informal

sector, where workers are denied the right to make any official claims on employers. The reformulated model acknowledges that informal workers occupy their own position in the class structure (as a class-in-itself). Capitalist accumulation in the modern economy relies on the labor of informal workers. Nevertheless, their relationship to employers remains tenuous; employers are not obligated to pay minimum wages, and they can hire and fire according to market needs. The amended model also acknowledges that informal workers' unique class location has led to unique interests around which they can and do mobilize (as a class-for-itself). To attain state attention in their demands for welfare goods, an identity card, and neighborhood provisions, they use the currency of votes and their flexible, cheap labor. While some informal workers' unions are simultaneously fighting for minimum wages, the structures of production have undermined their bargaining power vis-à-vis employers. Therefore, they expend more resources and energy on, and have encountered more successes in fighting for welfare benefits from the state. Figures 1 and 2 present a condensation and comparison of the traditional and revised models under consideration.

Informal workers' collective action strategies are cementing new forms of political ties between labor and the state by shifting the movement focus away from workers' rights to citizen rights. In turn, organized informal workers have created a new class identity that distinguishes informal from formal workers. Unlike formal employees who identify themselves as antitheses to capital, informal workers identify themselves as connected to the state through their social consumption needs.

Drawing from both the literature on states in developing economies and my reformulated labor movement model—where informal workers are pulling the state into playing an even more central role than it did in formal workers' movements—I developed a theoretical framework to answer my second question regarding the conditions under which informal workers' organizations succeed or fail in their efforts to secure material benefits for their members. This framework was designed to predict how economic policies (i.e., those that support vs. resist liberalization) and ruling party ideologies (i.e., those that are populist vs. programmatic) interact with one another, and with informal workers' organizations, to ultimately determine organizational aptitude. Despite differences in the conditions of work and current growth patterns in the construction and tobacco industries, I found no evidence for industry-specific variation in the effectiveness of informal workers' movements. Rather, the variation in strategy and success in attaining state-supported benefits is largely determined by regional state characteristics.

To test my framework, I examined the interaction between governments and informal workers' movements in three regional states of India. Each case represented a different combination of political ideologies and economic policies that was supported by an in-depth historical analysis of each state's political patterns. The theoretical framework predicted that the most effective organizations would be in Tamil Nadu, where populist leadership supports liberalization policies. The least effective organizations would be in West Bengal, where there is a programmatic leadership that resists liberalization policies. Organizations in Maharashtra, where

FIGURE 1
CONVENTIONAL MODEL—THE STATE, FORMAL
AND INFORMAL WORKERS

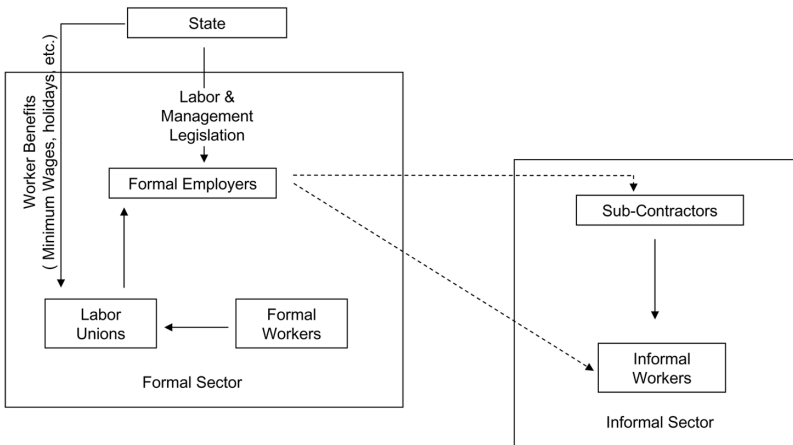
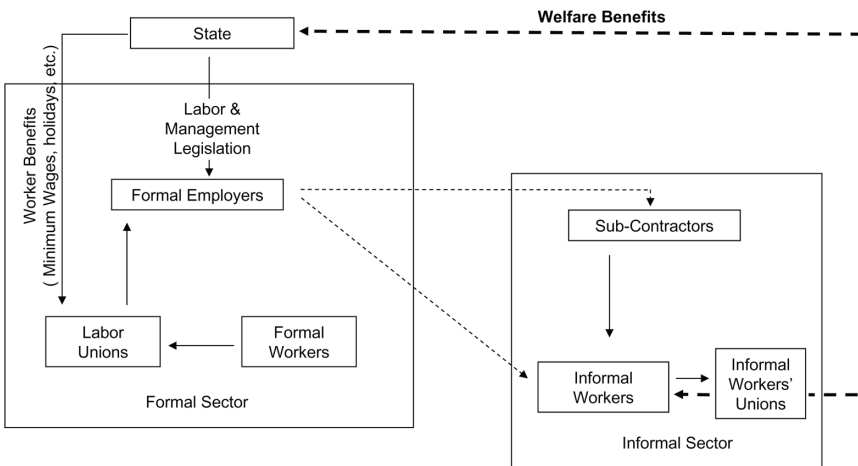


FIGURE 2
REFORMULATED MODEL—THE STATE, FORMAL
AND INFORMAL WORKERS



a programmatic leadership supports liberalization policies, were expected to have midlevels of success.

The findings from my three state case studies show full support for my theoretical framework in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal and mixed support in

Maharashtra. Indeed organizations in Tamil Nadu have been most successful in attaining state protection for informal workers. The state's workers enjoy higher wages than in either West Bengal or Maharashtra. In addition, the state government has extended more welfare benefits to informal workers than in any other state. The number of state-administered benefits achieved by Tamil Nadu's informal workers relies on (1) the interests of incumbent political parties in mobilizing votes and (2) the ability of an organization to mobilize their members as a large vote bank for local politicians. In addition, workers' ability to attain the state's attention in Tamil Nadu ironically relies on the state's commitment to a liberalization agenda. As the state's commitment increases, so does informal workers' bargaining power because their flexible, cheap labor is a vital peg in the state's economic project.

On the flip side, organizations in West Bengal have failed to attain state protection for informal workers. At first glance, Indian scholars will be surprised by this finding, especially given that the state has been ruled by the Communist Party of India-Marxists (CPM) for more than three decades. Nevertheless, my findings show that CPM's programmatic style, along with its disinterest in liberalizing, have made it difficult for unions to frame informal workers' demands in terms that would appeal to the CPM's top priority, staying in power. First, CPM has retained preeminence by implementing a reformist ideology and focusing almost exclusively on rural interests. This has constrained urban workers' struggles. Second, CPM's entrenched, nearly unthreatened, political rule has restricted informal workers' ability to make new demands by appealing to the state's interest in attaining more votes. Finally, CPM's rhetorical criticism of liberalization policies has undermined informal workers' ability to convince the authorities to privilege informal workers as a vital part of the new economy.

Finally, the case of Maharashtra lends mixed support for my framework, which predicted medium levels of success in that region. On one hand, as predicted, the level of benefit provision or state commitment in Maharashtra is less than that found in Tamil Nadu. On the other hand, informal workers in Maharashtra have attained some minimal levels of welfare benefits from the state, and the state government expresses some commitment to protecting informal workers. At the same time, the levels of success achieved in Maharashtra were not as far above that of West Bengal as might be expected by the Maharashtrian government's pursuit of liberalization. The state's entrenched programmatic leadership, which has traditionally been led and driven by intermediate and elite interests, has undermined informal workers' ability to make demands on the state in return for political support. Then again, the state government's deep commitment to liberalization and rapid, private sector industrialization has increased its interest in unregulated, informal labor. These factors have forced informal workers' organizations in Maharashtra to pursue a cooperative strategy with the state, where they frame themselves as an essential *partner* in the economic agenda. By not fighting as hard for a minimum wage and job security, informal workers in Maharashtra assure state officials that they will not resist the informal nature of their work. In return, the state must address their welfare needs, such as housing, health care, and education.

Despite a decline in the popularity of welfare spending during the promarket, neoliberal era, these three case studies show that informal workers' new strategies have led to state concessions that vary according to economic policy and political ideology. These findings do not aim to make a normative argument that the new form of unionism by informal workers is better than the traditional form. In part, the new movement may even be viewed as inferior to the traditional one since it does not make the structural changes necessary to eradicate social injustices. Moreover, welfare demands are not a perfect substitute for worker demands (such as minimum wages and job security). Rather, worker and welfare demands would ideally be met *in conjunction with* one another. At the moment, however, India's informal workers are attaining more success by mobilizing members and attaining state attention based on their welfare demands than on traditional workers' rights demands. This new form of workers' organization is expanding, and students of democratic participation should be interested in how informal workers are shaping the current phase of economic and political transition. Informal workers' movements provide key insights into the strategies that marginalized groups use to express their political voice, even as state policies erode their material circumstances. These new forms of unionism must not be discounted.

Given growing attention to the decline of labor mobilization (Western 1995), together with more evidence of states' decreasing capacity to protect their citizens due to their loss of control over capital flows (Castells 1997; Tilly 1995), my findings are surprising. They show that neoliberalism has uneven effects on working-class people and their options for attaining better conditions of life. They also yield insights into the strategies that marginalized groups use to express their political voice even as state and economic policies erode their material well-being.

*[My findings] show that neoliberalism
has uneven effects on working-class people
and their options for attaining
better conditions of life.*

Implications

Several important implications follow from my argument. First, informal workers' organizational strategies provide important clues about how they can mobilize in a system with little regulation and blurred employer-employee relations. For decades, industrialized workers have fought to formalize their identity

and work status through legislation designed to protect them against employer exploitation. Their efforts, while laudable, have affected only a minority of the world's workers.⁵ Now, due to the industrial restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, even the small global share of formally protected workers is diminishing. These changes have brought the scholarship of labor movements to a critical juncture by questioning traditional mobilization strategies that rely on formal protections.

My analysis of collective action strategies among a growing population of informal workers in India lends key insights into how workers adjust to the changing structures around them. Although economic reforms are increasing Indian workers' vulnerability, I find that the poorest workers are holding the one actor that cannot escape (i.e., the state) responsible for their welfare. Informal workers are forcing government authorities to acknowledge that they simply cannot live on the below-subsistence wages and unstable employment into which they are currently being forced. This finding alone makes it urgent for scholars to rethink the pessimism dominating the recent race-to-the-bottom literature. Labor movements may indeed be facing new challenges due to globalization. But it does not necessarily follow that workers are compliant in the face of these challenges.

Second, my findings call for a qualification of the prevailing definition of the informal sector. In particular, characterizations of the informal sector should specify that the lack of state regulation and protection of informal workers is limited to the conditions of their work and their employers and does not necessarily apply to their welfare at home or in their family. Informal workers in India continue to be unprotected in their work or by their employer. Yet they have managed to attain some welfare protections/benefits from the state, and they are actively fighting for more. Although these benefits are implemented with varying degrees of success, they are now required and regulated under law. Notably, the provision of these welfare benefits does not extend to the general public but is limited by law to informal workers.

Third, this study reasserts class as an important analytical tool with which to examine differences in life chances and resistance against exploitation. Class relationships, especially those in developing countries undergoing neoliberal reorganization, are being transformed as economic reforms alter structures of production. Despite other claims to the contrary, this study illustrates that class remains an important organizing vector allowing marginalized populations to identify, articulate, and demand a shared set of unique interests (based on their access to resources and relationship with other classes). These interests, and the strategies used to attain them, however, evolve over time. In recent years, Indian informal workers have put mounting pressure on the state, rather than the employer, to "de-commodify" their labor power. Karl Marx (1906) famously argued that a key trait of a capitalist market economy is that human labor is treated as a commodity. If there is no demand for labor power, there is no return to the living bearer of labor power and, in the end, no claim on subsistence. Capitalists are no longer being held responsible for that dilemma. Therefore, informal workers in India are trying to hold the state responsible for meeting their basic, social consumption

needs—*regardless* of their informal labor status—by demanding welfare benefits. If the state will not ensure a living wage sufficient to meet the costs of laborers' reproduction, then the state must directly compensate for the deficiency and ensure that reproduction is possible. Acknowledging and understanding the development of informal workers' unique interests (ensuring basic subsistence at home and for the family, despite their low, insecure wages) is vital to ensuring an adequate response from policy makers and scholars.

Fourth, these findings warrant rethinking state-society relations in the modern era. Neoliberal strategies may have succeeded in taking the state out of the detailed planning and control of the economy. Ironically, however, these same strategies have pulled the state deeper into directly managing and providing for people's daily lives. In India, informal workers are forcing the state to participate in decisions involving their children's education, health care, marriages, and even personal identity. These findings raise important questions on what impact class structures and class politics in the neoliberal context may have on state autonomy.

On one hand, the theoretical framework tested in this study shows that informal workers are most successful in states that have a populist leadership, especially one that supports liberalization policies. That workers in states merely pursuing liberalization policies (and without a populist leadership) were not as successful as initially predicted, lends further support for the significance of populism in the new workers' movement. In India, informal workers have attained state protection by identifying ways to capitalize on populist leaders' interest in retaining or attaining power.

This raises important questions as to the sustainability and the economic efficiency of informal workers' movements in the neoliberal era; populist leaders are not particularly known for either trait. At the same time, neoliberalism may be providing an ideal breeding ground for increased populism, especially if leaders become the only hope mass workers have for survival and security.

On the other hand, traditional left-oriented political parties that strive to meet workers' needs, such as the CPM, were found to be least helpful to informal workers. Left-oriented parties are resistant to changing their traditional labor movement strategies. Yet class structures, conditions of work, and structures of production are rapidly changing for all laborers. If left-oriented parties do not soon start appealing to the growing informal workforce, they may soon lose their claim as leaders of class struggle and representatives of workers' interests. If left-oriented parties can instead extend their ideological commitments to social justice toward supporting informal workers' movements, the vast majority of the world's workers may greatly benefit.

Fifth, this study sheds new insights into the role women play in linking the public and private spheres in contemporary labor movements. To date, labor movements have separated the workplace from the home environment. Most labor benefits tend to directly affect the worker in the workplace. Formal sector labor leaders and fellow union members rarely enter the privacy of workers' homes. Organization and solidarity has traditionally been built on the shop floor. As the structures of production become increasingly flexible and the relationships

between employer and employees blur, however, so do the distinctions between the public and private spheres. In India, the home has become the site of production, as in the case of *bidi*; the site of production has become the home, as in the case of construction. In either case, family issues, such as childrearing, education, health care, marriage, and home ownership are intertwined with the conditions of work. In India's informal workers' movement, therefore, women have played a key role in pushing for welfare benefits, because such benefits aid in spheres for which women are held responsible.

Finally, this study makes important contributions to the growing literature on global cities. According to the United Nations, between 2000 and 2030, the world's urban population will grow by 2.12 billion; only 28 million of this increase will come from developed countries. By 2030, 60 percent of the world's population will be living in cities; the vast majority will be in poor cities in developing nations (UN-HABITAT 2004). The social and political consequences of these changes are sure to be profound. With increased social vulnerabilities as well as job insecurities, absolute poverty and inequality are expected to rise to unprecedented levels. It is vital we understand the mechanisms poor, urban workers are using to attain a political voice. This study begins to address that issue.

Areas for Further Research

This study also raises several questions for further research. First, how prevalent are these trends in the non-Indian context? These findings from India should be compared in a cross-national perspective to other informal workers' movements around the world. Some recent studies have shown evidence of similar findings in other countries, including Peru, Brazil, South Africa, and the United States. Janice Fine's (2006) recent study on workers' centers in the United States found that immigrant workers are fighting for welfare rights, rather than worker rights, and they are organizing around neighborhoods and community, rather than workplace. Dan Clawson's (2003) study on social movements among minority workers in the United States, Gay Seidman's (1994) study of workers in South Africa and Brazil, and Kim Moody's (1997) study of workers in France and Canada have also found that workers are instigating a new form of mass politics that simultaneously straddles worker and citizen identities. These movements, dubbed "social movement unionism," use union democracy as a source of power and social vision to connect the masses with the state, and their findings resonate with my Indian case study. More such studies focusing on informal workers throughout the world are needed to assert whether a modern blend of class politics may now be finding a new echo in the informal sector.

Second, how do informal workers' movements vary by sector and industry? Studies across more sectors will provide further insight into how pervasive informal workers' movements are and how they may differ according to conditions of work. This study examines casual labor in manufacturing (specifically in the construction and *bidi* industries). Future research should examine movements among

casual labor in the service industry, which is rapidly growing in both developing and developed countries. In India, domestic servants have recently organized to initiate a welfare board that is similar to that of construction and bidi workers.

In addition, future studies should examine workers' movements among the self-employed. Indian self-employed workers occupy a slightly larger share of the informal sector than casual workers. Moreover, self-employment is being encouraged by states and multilateral institutions throughout the world. In India, street vendors (who are self-employed) are currently organized into large, politically influential unions, and they too are negotiating for welfare boards. In the United States, home care workers and family day care workers have waged similar campaigns where they organized to elect a representative, who in turn won them an increase in the rate of pay and benefits. Further study is required to examine the varying strategies used in these movements and the varying conditions for their success.

Finally, future research should investigate how formal sector labor movements are reacting to informal workers' movements. Formal sector trade union membership is declining the world over, and they may be open to new strategies for the sake of survival. Indian formal sector trade unions are indeed turning to informal workers' movements for new ideas and strategies on how to handle a future of blurred employer-employee relationships. At the 2005 annual meeting for CITU, one of the largest and oldest union federations in India, union leaders made understanding and coordinating informal workers their top priority agenda item for the year. On the other hand, informal workers' movements may be viewed by formal sector unions as a threat to traditional class-based mobilizations (that focused on guaranteeing workers benefits from employers). During the 1880s in the United States, the Knights of Labor presented an alternative organizing model based on residential communities. Nevertheless, their efforts were undermined by a direct attack from the established trade unions and indirect sabotage by political parties. Both saw the Knights as competitors. Further research on how political parties and formal unions react to informal workers' movements throughout the world can lend greater insights into the sustainability of informal workers' movements.

This study has shown that informal workers are playing a vital role in shaping a new relationship between the state and labor in the current era of liberalization and globalization. Further studies should expand on the findings from India to examine how this movement grows and whether it generates spillover. The informal workers' movement is at a critical juncture in terms of its future growth. On one hand, it could grow to shape the state's role in workers' lives across all sectors of the economy. On the other hand, the movement could fall backward into a scenario where the state continues to extend its responsibilities to its workers, but in an ad hoc manner that eventually mirrors traditional patron-client relations. Further research into informal workers' movements in a liberalization context is essential to understanding the myriad of problems arising in the implementation of state benefits for workers.

The findings in this study reflect a global trend toward what some scholars have termed "social-movement unionism," in which traditional union movements

are converging with newer social forms to create a new mass politics that straddles people's worker and citizen identities. These movements use union democracy as a source of power and social vision to connect the masses with the state. As Gay Seidman (1994, 2-3) wrote,

Marx suggested that levels of reproduction of labor power, on which wages and living standards are based, are historically determined, through struggles between classes. Social-movement unionism consists of precisely such struggles over wages and working conditions, and also other living conditions in working-class areas.

Social movement unionism has been documented in Brazil; South Africa; and even France, Canada, and the United States (Clawson 2003; Moody 1997; Seidman 1994). This study contributes to this literature by adding further evidence from the world's most populous democracy. But more important, this study shows that India's social movement unionism is being spearheaded by the informal sector. It is intriguing that a modern blend of class politics may now be finding a new echo in, of all places, the informal sector.

Notes

1. The only exception was the National State of Emergency, declared by then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi from 1975 to 1977.

2. Although there are several debates on the exact definition of the informal sector, this definition has been largely accepted in much of the literature (see Cross 1998; De Soto 1989; Portes 1994). To operationalize this definition, I utilize the worker-based definition of informal work that was endorsed by the 17th International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) in 2003 and utilized by the National Sample Survey of Employment and Unemployment (NSS) in India in 1999.

3. For a concise summary of this debate, see Rakowski (1994).

4. See Kundu and Sharma (2001); and Oberai and Chadha (2001).

5. This is a narrow claim, specific to worker protection. Collective action by industrialized workers has, of course, made substantial contributions to the mass population in other arenas, such as suffrage and citizenship. (See Collier and Mahoney 1997; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992).

References

- Adapt or die: Unions must start providing services their members need. 2003. *The Economist*, June, p. 13.
- Badie, Bertrand, and Pierre Birnbaum. 1983. *The sociology of the state*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Bairoch, Paul. 1973. *Urban unemployment in developing countries: The nature of the problem and proposals for its solution*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization.
- Beneria, Lourdes, and Martha Roldan. 1987. *The crossroads of class & gender: Industrial homework, subcontracting, and household dynamics in Mexico City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1984. Karl Marx and the satanic mills: Factory politics under early capitalism in England, the United States, and Russia. *American Journal of Sociology* 90:247-82.
- Carr, M., M. Chen, and R. Jhabvala, eds. 1996. *Speaking out*. New Delhi, India: Vistaar.
- Castells, Manuel. 1997. *The information age*. Vol. 2, *The power of identity*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Rethinking working-class history*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chandavarkar, Rajnarayan. 1994. *The origins of industrial capitalism in India: Business strategies and the working classes in Bombay, 1900-40*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Chibber, Vivek. 2003. *Locked in place: State-building and late industrialization in India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chowdhury, Supriya Roy. 2003. Old classes and new spaces: Urban poverty, unorganised labour and new unions. *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 13, p. 38.
- Clawson, Dan. 2003. *The next upsurge: Labor and the new social movements*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Collier, Ruth Berins, and David Collier. 1991. *Shaping the political arena: Critical junctures, the labor movement, and regime dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Collier, Ruth Berins, and James Mahoney. 1997. Adding collective actors to collective outcomes: Labor and recent democratization in South America and Southern Europe. *Comparative Politics* 29:285-303
- Cross, John. 1998. *Informal politics: Street vendors and the state in Mexico City*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- De Soto, Hernando. 1989. *The other path: The informal revolution*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Deyo, Frederic. 1989. *Beneath the miracle: Labor subordination in the New Asian industrialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fernandes, Leela. 1997. *Producing workers: The politics of gender, class, and culture in the Calcutta jute mills*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Fine, Janice. 2006. *Worker centers: Organizing communities at the edge of the dream*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press/Cornell University Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1963. *Peddlers and princes: Social change and economic modernization in two Indonesian towns*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Grasmuck, S., and R. Espinal. 2000. Market success or female autonomy? Income, ideology, and empowerment among microentrepreneurs in the Dominican Republic. *Gender & Society* 14:231-55.
- Gugler, Josef. 1991. Employment in the city. In *Cities, poverty, and development: Urbanization in the third world*, ed. Alan Gilbert and Josef Gugler. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harris, J., and M. Todaro. 1970. Migration, unemployment and development: A two sector analysis. *American Economic Review* 40:126-42.
- Hart, Keith. 1973. Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 11:61-89.
- Heller, Patrick. 1999. *The labor of development: Workers and the transformation of capitalism in Kerala, India*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Herring, Ronald, and Henry C. Hart. 1977. *Land tenure and peasant in South Asia*. Edited by Robert E. Frykenberg. New Delhi, India: Orient Longman.
- Katzenstein, Mary, Smitu Kothari, and Uday Mehta. 2001. Social movement politics in India: Institutions, interests, and identities. In *The success of India's democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kundu, Amitabh, and Alakh N. Sharma, eds. 2001. *Informal sector in India: Perspectives and policies*. New Delhi, India: Institute for Human Development and Institute of Applied Manpower Research.
- Lewis, W. A. 1954. *Economic development with unlimited supplies of labour*. Pp. 139-91. Manchester, UK: Manchester School 22.
- Macharia, Kinuthia. 1997. *Social and political dynamics of the informal economy in African cities: Nairobi and Harare*. Oxford: University Press of America.
- Marx, Karl. 1906. *Capital: A critique of political economy*. Chicago: C.H. Kerr & Company.
- Moody, Kim. 1997. *Workers in a lean world: Unions in the international economy*. London: Verso.
- Moore, Barrington. 1966. *Social origins of dictatorship and democracy: Lord and peasant in the making of the modern world*. Boston: Beacon.
- National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO). 2001. Employment and unemployment situation in India, 1999-2000. Calcutta: NSSO, Government of India.
- Oberai, A. S., and G. K. Chadha, eds. 2001. *Job creation in urban informal sector in India: Issues and policy options*. New Delhi, India: International Labor Organization.
- Omvedt, Gail. 1993. *Reinventing revolution: New social movements and the socialist tradition in India*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Portes, A. 1994. The informal economy and its paradoxes. In *Handbook of economic sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, 426-49. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Portes, Alejandro, Manuel Castells, and Lauren A. Benton. 1989. *The informal economy: Studies in advanced and less developed countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rakowski, Cathy A. 1994. *Contrapunto: The informal sector debate in Latin America*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Rudolph, Lloyd I., and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. 1987. *In pursuit of Lakshmi: The political economy of the Indian state*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rueschemeyer, Dietrich, Evelyne H. Stephens, and John D. Stephens. 1992. *Capitalist development and democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sanyal, Bishwapriya. 1991. Organizing the self-employed: The politics of the urban informal sector. *International Labour Review* 130:39-56.
- Seidman, Gay W. 1994. *Manufacturing militance: Workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa, 1970-1985*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sharma, Alakh N., and Piush Antony. 2001. *Women workers in the unorganised sector: The more the merrier?* New Delhi, India: Institute for Human Development.
- Silver, Beverly J. 2003. *Forces of labor: Workers' movements and globalization since 1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, E. P. 1966. *The making of the English working class*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Tilly, Charles. 1978. *From mobilization to revolution*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- . 1995. Globalisation threatens labor's rights. *International Labor and Working-Class History* 47:1-23.
- UN-HABITAT. 2004. *State of the world's cities: Globalization and urban culture*. New York: UN-HABITAT.
- Western, Bruce. 1995. A comparative study of working-class disorganization: Union decline in eighteen advanced capitalist countries. *American Sociological Review* 60:179-201.