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Labour Regimes and the Labour Problem in Asia

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Our presentation is about work, employment and labour relations in the seven East/South-East Asian countries of Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, and in China. Following an account of the key features of the labour problem in each country, including the converging industrial relations of China and Vietnam, we conclude that the interface between industrial democracy and economic development remains a useful heuristic for understanding labour in the region (Deyo 1981; Leggett 1999).

We draw on a special issue of the *Chronique Internationale de l'IRES* (Delahaie and Le Queux 2016) [published July 2017], including updates. Our reports on Indonesia (minimum



wage fixing) and Thailand (labour exclusion) touch upon decent work in low-wage economies; the one on the Philippines exposes the rise of precarious employment, on Singapore tripartite policies directed to the Singaporean 'core' workforce, and on Taiwan the claims for distributive justice. The latter two address the challenges and contradictions of maintaining a productivity agenda under corporatist regimes. Our report on Malaysia is about the fate of migrant workers at the edge of 'modern slavery' and our comparative analysis of China and Vietnam focuses on the nature and modality of industrial disputes and how these come to challenge established Communist labour institutions, with special attention given to 'wildcat' strikes, particularly in Vietnam.

Our meta-analysis supports the view that states play a dominant role in the 'pacification' of industrial relations, with capital 'accumulation' being the primary motive (Ford and Gillan 2016). International pressures and social clauses in trade agreement yield some advance, but commitment to the enforcement of workers' rights remains problematic. Working conditions are largely poor across the region and except for incorporated labour institutions, as in Singapore, organised labour is on the retreat, although less so in Indonesia. However, the cases of China and Vietnam suggest that rapid industrialisation, intense social change and ineffective formal trade unions leads to the formation of unofficial worker representatives who fight for employee rights and distributive justice.

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Migrant Workers

Session Migrants working conditions