

**Enrique Fernández Macías**  
Universidad de Salamanca, SPAIN

## Job Instability and Political Attitudes Towards Work: Some Lessons From the Spanish Case

**ABSTRACT** ■ It is widely assumed that workers whose labour market situation is insecure are likely to be individualistic, with negative attitudes towards trade unionism. This article uses Spain as a critical case to test the effects of labour market flexibility. Survey data reveal that, in fact, the attitudes of insecure workers towards trade unionism and mobilization at work are more positive than those of stable employees, and they are more critical of the prevailing economic system. These results are discussed within the framework of current debates on the crisis of trade unionism and the effects of flexibility in industrial relations.

### Introduction

Flexibility has been the catchword for changes in labour markets in the past 20 years.<sup>1</sup> Companies have pursued means to adapt to variations in demand in more competitive product markets, and to make effective use of new information technologies. In part, this has involved the re-organization of task structures and production systems (functional flexibility), and in part, the reduction in employment security (numerical flexibility).

The latter process reverses the trend in the years of postwar expansion towards enhanced employment protection (Alonso, 1999; Felstead and Jewson, 1999; Heery and Salmon, 2000), though the consequences of this new insecurity are very different for workers according to their different positions and qualifications (software engineers and building labourers, for example).

The rise of labour market flexibility is causally linked to the crisis of trade unions evident in most western countries during the past two decades. In general, unions have had difficulty in representing the interests of an increasingly segmented working class, while membership rates have dropped and workers' organizations have been progressively losing

influence in the power structure of society (Ferner and Hyman, 1998; Richards and Polavieja, 1997).

What is the mechanism behind this relationship? There are three main ways in which flexibility can affect unionism. First, it can change the attitudes of workers, either because labour market 'outsiders' blame unions for defending the interests of 'insiders' at their expense or by producing a segmentation of the working class which weakens unionism because of the collapse of the 'community of interests' which is its social base. Second, greater segmentation can increase the costs of union organizing efforts and make it less likely that there will be a union presence in individual workplaces. Third, flexibility may change the balance of power between employers and workers, and increase employer resistance to unionism.

In this article, our main concern is with the first explanation. Has flexibility indeed made workers less prone to act collectively? Has it produced a conflict between workers which has turned 'outsiders' against unions? This article uses Spanish evidence to explore the link between job instability and political attitudes towards work, primarily, but not exclusively, as these relate to trade unionism.

What makes the Spanish case interesting for the study of the effects of flexibilization is the fact that it is an atypical case. For historical and political reasons discussed below, in Spain the international pressure towards flexibility was resolved through a strong dualization of the labour market (numerical rather than functional flexibility) in the 1980s (Jimeno and Toharia, 1994; Muñoz de Bustillo, 2002). Subsequent reforms of the labour market have deepened this dualism. Hence, the Spanish labour market is divided into two segments that differ markedly as regards stability, wages and working conditions: the stable segment composed of those with permanent contracts (around two-thirds of the labour force) and the unstable segment made up of those employed on some kind of fixed-term contract (the other third). What makes Spain a good case study is the fact that it is a critical case, as defined by Yin (1994). If dualization and labour market flexibility do indeed lead outsiders to reject trade unionism and collectivist values, this should be evident here.

The following discussion first outlines the experience of labour market flexibility in Spain. Next, we discuss the most important existing theories on the effects of flexibility on political attitudes towards work, proposing our own explanatory model. Then, using data from two surveys of Spanish workers' attitudes, we evaluate the validity of the theories discussed. Lastly, we attempt to generalize from the Spanish case.

## Spanish Exceptionalism

Why is labour market dualism in Spain so extreme? The reason is that flexibilization took place in a situation marked by the confrontation of two strong opposing forces: on the one hand, a high level of social conflict and a very powerful and popular labour movement; on the other, the strong impact of international economic crisis and an extremely high level of unemployment.

Both trends were a result of the Francoist legacy and of the transition to democracy. The high level of social conflict was the outcome of the rapid transformation of the political system from dictatorship to democracy. The strength and legitimacy of Spanish unions were the consequence of the leading role they played in the struggle against the Francoist regime and in the transition to democracy. These elements made it very difficult to weaken labour market protection in the same way as in the other western countries during that period. Yet the opening of Spain to international markets broke down the outdated and inefficient Francoist economic regime (Jimeno and Toharia, 1994: 23). This caused an economic crisis, with a brutal destruction of jobs that raised unemployment levels to the highest in Europe.

The reason for the *atypical* flexibilization of the Spanish labour market is to be found in the confluence of these two opposing trends (Martínez Lucio and Blyton, 1995). Under Franco it was very difficult to fire workers; the regime had used 'a quasi-tenured employment system to compensate for the low level of wages and to help to legitimate the system' (Muñoz de Bustillo, 2002: 12). After the transition to democracy, economic crisis and rising unemployment created pressures to reform the labour market to make it more flexible (Bilbao, 1993), but it was politically necessary to do so in a way that produced a low level of social and labour conflict. Hence, the reforms did not affect the rights of those already in the labour market (and who would have reacted most strongly), but made the labour situation of those newly entering the labour market extremely insecure. As a consequence of these reforms, from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s almost all new contracts were fixed term; more permanent jobs were destroyed than created in this period. Thus, the structure of the Spanish labour market was transformed, reaching a level of flexibility similar to that of other western countries, but with an atypical character.

Open economies tend towards a similar aggregate level of flexibility, but this aggregate can be reached in many ways, depending on the *institutional restrictions* on reform and (as we have seen) on the power structure in the labour market. It can be reached by making the labour market as a whole more flexible or (as in the Spanish case) by maintaining the security of one segment of the labour force and making the other segment

even more insecure to compensate.<sup>2</sup> The labour market then becomes divided between a primary segment with stable jobs and a secondary segment which has to adapt to instability of demand. In this sense, Spain is an exaggerated case of dualism (Doeringer and Piore, 1985; Piore, 1980).

In Spain, we can thus study the effects of two different aspects of flexibility. The first involves *the effects of job instability*. Such instability has increased in most European countries, though its form and extent vary; the instability of Spanish temporary workers is the extreme case within a wider European trend. Thus, in Spain, we can study the effects of this instability on workers' attitudes particularly clearly, by comparing temporary workers with their permanent counterparts. This is the sense in which our results may be generalized.

Second, we can examine *the effects of the dualization of the labour market*. The differences between the working conditions of labour market insiders and outsiders are probably greater in Spain than anywhere else, so it is also a good case for studying the effects of dualism. The results, in this case, cannot be generalized to western European countries without a similar trend towards dualism, but can be extended to countries that share some of the historical features that led to dualism in Spain. Many eastern European countries would probably fit into this category, since they share with Spain an authoritarian background (where dismissal was often difficult), powerful labour movements, and a strong urge for flexibilization (Thirkell and Vickerstaff, 1999).

## Theoretical Considerations

As indicated in the introduction, labour market flexibility is generally assumed to affect workers' attitudes in ways which have a negative impact on trade unionism. Two main theoretical approaches can be distinguished. The first posits a *transformation in workers' identities* as a result of historical changes in the system of production, typically defined as a transition from Fordism to post-Fordism. This change is widely regarded as the cause of a shift from a collectivist identity, structured around work, to an individualistic one, structured around consumption (Alonso, 1999; Bell, 1973; Bilbao, 1993; Lash and Urry, 1987). This shift is viewed as the cause of a crisis of trade unionism and class politics. Put simply, workers no longer identify with labour organizations. Trade unionism is either condemned to obsolescence (as a phenomenon of an earlier stage of capitalism) or must radically change to represent the new worker identity, becoming more oriented towards the individual consumer than to the collectivity of workers (Bild and Jorgensen, 1998).

Two very different conclusions are often drawn. One, which may be called *post-modern*, takes a positive stance and considers the change an

advance beyond an obsolete social model (Bell, 1973; Jordan, 1994). Such a perspective is typical of the rhetoric of human resource management (Dunn, 1998). A second approach, which we may call *radical*, reaches very different conclusions. Here, too, it is assumed that post-Fordism makes the worker more individualistic, but this is seen as a negative change involving the degradation of work. Workers affected by flexibility are driven to fierce competition for jobs, and reject and distrust collective action. Changes in labour markets thus 'tend to form a conscience of individualism, completely opposed to collective references' (Bilbao, 1999: 41). Insecure workers' conception of work is more instrumental, cynical and competitive than that of the typical Fordist worker (Bilbao, 1993; Hyman, 1999: 4).

The second general approach departs from the assumption that unions have played a crucial role in the segmentation of the labour market: rather than representing the interests of the working class as a whole, they have primarily defended insiders against outsiders. According to the classic hypothesis of Rubery (1988), insecure workers have been regarded as a threat to the working conditions of the secure and stable, and unions have defended their primary constituency (stable workers) through strategies of social closure. It seems to follow that insecure workers would not feel represented by the unions and would display negative attitudes towards them (Boix, 1996; Polavieja, 2001). They would perceive unions as their enemies (or at least as the representatives of their enemies) in their struggle with stable workers for jobs.

While these approaches offer some important insights, they also involve problems. First, they are not historically well grounded, and thus exaggerate the probable effects of recent changes in labour markets. Employment stability in the period of the welfare state was historically exceptional; in most countries, trade unionism was created and expanded when jobs were much more unstable and precarious than today (Thompson, 1967). Hence there is no compelling reason to assume that contemporary flexibility and job instability will destroy trade unionism. Nor is it clear why flexibility should be assumed to produce individualism and integration in the value system of consumer capitalism. If we take into account that in most cases it increases work precariousness, it seems far more reasonable to argue that it will produce precisely the contrary effect: anomie and detachment from the prevailing value system.

The main problem with the thesis that labour market segmentation causes conflict between different categories of workers is that this is not relevant for all types of trade unionism. The original argument was developed in the context of Anglo-Saxon trade unionism, with its interunion fragmentation and sectional bargaining strategies. Continental unions, by contrast, often encompass class organizations that depend strongly on their capacity to represent the working class as a whole.<sup>3</sup> This obliges

them to *resist* the segmentation of the working class. It also means that the interests they defend are not simply those of their actual members (in Spain, as in France, a small proportion of the labour force), but of a broader constituency. This is institutionally reinforced in the Spanish model by the four-yearly system of union elections, which creates a unionism of 'voters' rather than of 'members' (Martínez Lucio, 1992: 500; Taboadela, 1993).

The point of departure of our own approach may be termed heterodox materialism. It is materialist because (in line with the Marxist tradition of class analysis) social action is understood as a struggle for limited resources between actors in different positions in a structure of inequalities. The labour market is a field of conflict between buyers and sellers of work, a struggle for the distribution of the resources generated by the production process. At the same time, our approach is heterodox because it incorporates some notions of the 'social construction of reality'. Political action is not directly dependent on 'material interests', but mediated by the perceptions of the actors, which depend, in turn, on the cognitive frames of reference available to them. As a corollary, the attitudes of workers towards trade unionism and politics at work depend very much on the contact they have with unions in their working life. The contact with workers' organizations is crucial in order to develop, categorize and verbalize the worker's very existence in terms of class politics.

This points to some hypotheses on the effects of job instability on political attitudes towards work. Under what conditions would job instability produce such important changes in workers' attitudes as the theories reviewed imply? There would have to be a radical change in the main lines of conflict in the labour market, producing a realignment of interests and, consequently, of identities. We do not think that such a radical change has taken place: the main lines of conflict in the labour market remain the same, even in the Spanish case with its strong dualism. But that does not mean that increased job instability and labour market dualism do not influence workers' attitudes; they affect workers' capability to organize and thus make it more difficult for workers to articulate their interests collectively.

Our hypotheses are, thus, as follows.

1. Job instability will have a relatively small impact on attitudes, since the fundamental interests of workers have not changed.
2. To the extent that these interests *have* changed, it is because the (unstable) workers' situation has become more precarious, which *increases* the need for institutional or organizational defence.
3. At the same time, attitudes are not a direct result of objective interests, but are socially constructed. Job instability and labour market dualism have an adverse impact on workers' organization, particularly among

unstable workers (as indicated below, union density among such workers is only a third of the level of that of secure employees); therefore, unionism is not a frame of reference in their working lives.

These hypotheses imply that job instability may well encourage positive attitudes towards collective organization and mobilization, but that the attitudes of insecure workers will be less articulated, less involved and weaker because their contact with unionism is weaker.

By contrast, workers with more stable labour relations will probably tend to have slightly more negative attitudes towards unions and mobilization at work than workers with unstable labour relations. They are in a better position against their employer and have less need for collective organization and defence. On the other hand, as they have more contact with unions in the workplace, their attitudes will be more articulated and more involved, either positively or negatively.

## Empirical Evidence

The Spanish labour market, as we have seen, is distinguished by its strong segmentation according to type of contract. This has a clear and negative impact on industrial relations, in that union membership is extremely low among temporary workers. But can this be attributed to attitudinal differences? To test our hypothesis that this is not the case, we draw on results from two surveys. The first, conducted in 1991, was part of an international project supervised by Erik O. Wright, the Survey on Class Structure, Conscience and Biography (ECBC). The Spanish research was undertaken by J. Carabaña and was financed by the Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), the Spanish Women's Institute and the City Council of Madrid. There were 6632 respondents, 3711 of them workers, and this is the sample we use in this article. The second survey was conducted by J.M. Maravall for the Centre for Sociological Research (CIS) in 1994 (study 2088 on Spanish workers' attitudes towards unions); the sample used here comprises 2186 workers. Both samples are representative of the whole Spanish workforce, and both surveys were specifically designed to study workers' attitudes towards a wide range of issues, including political attitudes towards work.

Our aim is to use quantitative data from these surveys to analyse the political culture at work of unstable workers. However, there is a methodological problem: survey data leave out the essence of politics, that is, its collective and dynamic nature. Survey data are inevitably individual and make attitudes appear static. Thus, we can only use survey questions as *proxies* of attitudes towards politics at work, and try to see

if the hypotheses derived from the theories reviewed can explain the data we have on the attitudes of Spanish workers.

A further methodological issue is whether to consider other variables than those directly included in our model. Our hypotheses all refer to the relationship between job instability and political attitudes towards work; so we could simply use type of contract as the independent variable and workers' attitudes as the dependent variable. But any effect discovered could be due to variables not included in the model, for example, the composition of the two groups (workers with stable and unstable labour contracts) could be different. For instance, if most temporary workers were women, the observed relationship between temporary work and attitudes could be due not to job instability, but to gender.<sup>4</sup>

For this reason, we checked whether the relationship found between job instability and political attitudes towards work might be affected by other variables. After controlling for demographic and labour market variables (age, gender and education; and occupation and size of the workplace), the relationship holds, and in some cases becomes even stronger. Nevertheless, to make the exposition clearer most of the data shown in this article are bivariate. But in order to show that the results hold when controlling for other variables, in a later section a multivariate analysis is given of the most important and reliable indicator of attitudes towards unions.

## **Political Attitudes Towards Work and the Identity of Temporary Workers**

Our first finding, consistent across almost every variable reviewed, is that the differences between the attitudes of stable and unstable workers are small (see Table 1). In general, they have a much more similar conception of work,<sup>5</sup> and political attitudes towards work, than would be expected when taking into account the important differences that exist in their working conditions. This suggests that *workers' attitudes* cannot explain the different rates of organization and mobilization of workers in stable and unstable segments of the labour market.

Though small, differences do exist, and in some cases they are important, but not in a direction that supports the idea that job instability produces dissolution of working-class identity and a development of an individualistic world-view. Those who identify less as belonging to the working class, and those who have a more positive and integrated attitude towards free enterprise and the capitalist system, are the stable workers (see Table 2).

Temporary workers see themselves as belonging to the working class more than do permanent workers, who are closer to a middle-class

TABLE 1. Comparison of Unstable and Stable Workers

	Unstable workers (%)	Stable workers (%)
Trade union member	8.6	24.3
Some kind of workers' representation in the workplace	31.4	63.2
Non-member: does not agree with union policies	11.0	18.6
Non-member: does not like union people	3.6	5.3
Non-member: does not trust unions	0.1	1.9
Non-member: does not consider membership necessary	63.0	54.3
'Spanish trade unions are modern'	32.9	29.2
'Spanish trade unions are old-fashioned'	55.7	60.9
'Spanish trade unions have too much power'	13.5	17.0
'Spanish trade union leaders are unreasonable'	38.5	41.5

Source: CIS 2088 (1994).

TABLE 2. Political Attitudes, Self-Assigned Class and Trust in Unions

	Unstable workers (%)	Stable workers (%)
Defines self as working class	55.8	47.2
Defines self as middle class	37.6	46.5
'Firms benefit owners at the expense of workers and consumers'	73.6	62.7
'During a strike, employing strike-breakers must be forbidden by law'	62.0	57.5
'It is fair to stop strike-breakers physically from entering the workplace'	42.0	35.6
<i>Scale 0-10 (mean)</i>		
Self-definition as anti-capitalist (10) or pro-capitalist (0)	5.73	5.20
Self-definition as pro-union (10) or pro-employer (0)	6.11	5.71
Identification with unions	2.47	2.96
Trust in unions	5.03	4.75

Source: ECBC (1991).

identity. This is presumably because a stable job is much closer to the middle-class model than an unstable one. The fact that temporary workers identify more as working than as middle class shows an identity less integrated in the dominant discourse of mass consumption society, which proclaims the end of class conflict under the hegemony of the middle classes (Alonso, 1999: 36). This attitude also appears among

temporary workers when they are asked about the economic organization of contemporary society: they are more opposed to the market and enterprise system, consider themselves more anti-capitalist, are more in favour of mobilization at work and are more pro-union than stable workers.

All these findings show that the theory that says that job instability produces individualism, a lessened working-class identity, and an attitude more integrated in the dominant social and economic model is wrong, or at least in the Spanish case. What happens is precisely the contrary. This difference can best be explained by the simple fact that instability worsens working conditions, and therefore worsens the attitudes of workers to the system. Job instability, fomenting competition between workers, does not make their world-view more individualistic and competitive.

### Attitudes of Temporary Workers Towards Unions

If temporary workers are not less collectivist, nor less in favour of workers' mobilization, and are not more capitalist in their world-view than stable workers, why are they less likely to join unions? Perhaps the second theory explains this: temporary workers do not feel they are represented by the unions, which they see as a tool of stable workers for the defence of the stable workers' own privileges. The data we have about the *identification* of workers with unions seem to support this hypothesis; and indeed, this finding has been used to substantiate this specific argument (Richards and Polavieja, 1997: 41). On a scale from zero to 10, temporary workers identify with unions on average almost half a point less than workers with permanent contracts. The difference is small, but statistically robust ( $p < .05$ ).

But what does this variable measure exactly? The survey question was: 'specify, on a scale of 0 to 10, the degree to which you identify with each of the following groups'. Before 'a trade union', the survey asked for identification with 'your family', 'your group of friends', 'your town', 'your social class', and 'a political party'. This design has a serious problem: it is not at all the same to identify with 'your family' or 'your group of friends' as to identify with 'a political party' or 'a trade union'. The former are clearly groups in which people belong (for that reason the questionnaire says 'your'), while the latter are for most people institutions and not groups of belonging. They are groups in this sense only for their members. What this variable measures, then, is belonging, and not identification. This can be proved by controlling for membership: in this case, the difference between temporary and permanent workers disappears. Regardless of job stability, all workers *not members* of unions identify with unions more or less the same, and the same is true for members.

Another variable is more relevant, in our view. This is a question about trust in a series of institutions, one of which is trade unions. In this case, the difference between temporary and permanent workers is the reverse of that in respect of identification. Again the difference is small, but again it is statistically robust ( $p < .05$ ). It shows that temporary workers trust unions slightly more than permanent workers. Other variables follow the same direction: temporary workers consider themselves more pro-union than permanent workers; they believe less that unions are old-fashioned and more that they are modern; they disagree more with the idea that union leaders are unreasonable and that unions have too much power in Spanish society.

Hence, unstable workers have more positive attitudes towards unions than permanent workers. But what effect does contact with unions have on these attitudes? For some writers, contact with existing unions (because of their commitment to the interests of 'insiders') causes disillusionment: 'if an outsider worker holds pro-working class views, she could experience much more of a disillusion with existing unions precisely because her expectations are higher' (Polavieja, 2001: 27). But our data show precisely the contrary: it seems that contact with unions makes temporary workers evaluate them more highly. Temporary workers whose workplace has union representatives have a better opinion of unions than those whose workplace has not (mean of 5.15, as against 4.93). For those who have participated in workplace union elections, the difference is even greater (5.59, as against 4.85).

It is important to stress that the degree of contact of temporary workers with unions is extremely low. Our own research shows that only one in three unstable workers knows of a workplace union representative, while more than 60 percent of employees with permanent contracts have such representatives. It seems reasonable to assume that this is the main reason why unstable workers are far less unionized than those with secure contracts.

One final variable can be used to evaluate the hypothesis of conflict between workers: the reasons that non-members themselves give for not having joined unions. Again, the differences are small, but they follow the same direction as those already discussed. The reasons temporary workers give for not joining unions are less negative towards unions than those of permanent workers. Permanent workers are more likely to respond that they have not joined unions because they 'do not agree with their policies', 'do not like union people' and 'do not trust them'. Conversely, temporary workers state much more often that they are not union members because they 'have never found it necessary', the most 'neutral' of all the possible answers.<sup>6</sup> Hence, while permanent workers are much more involved in unions than temporary workers, permanent non-unionized workers are much more 'militant' in their non-membership (more

opposed to unions) than temporary non-members. Among temporary workers there are fewer members (which in some way is in itself a measure of lower involvement), but their attitude is less negative. The position of temporary workers is less extreme and less polarized, but their average evaluation of unions is slightly more positive than that of permanent workers.

## Multivariate Analysis

In order to show that the results presented above hold even if we introduce control variables into the model, we provide a short multivariate analysis of the 'trust in unions' indicator. This is probably the best single indicator of attitudes towards trade unions. As it is an ordinal variable (a scale of 0–10), we can perform ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) estimations of the difference in trust in unions between stable and unstable workers, controlling for other variables.

The first column of Table 3 shows the difference between the mean values for unstable and stable workers, while the second shows the significance of the model, such that if the value is less than 0.05, we can consider the estimated difference quite reliable. The first row shows the uncorrected difference of means, indicating that Spanish temporary workers evaluate trade unions 0.28 points higher than stable workers.

The following rows estimate the difference when introducing various control variables (selected as those which a priori seem most likely to affect the relationship). Except when controlling for age, in all cases the estimated difference is barely altered. As for the test of statistical significance, the difference found in the uncorrected model is highly significant; of the remainder, only those controlling for sex and education are statistically significant. The reason is that occupation, firm size and education are not significantly associated with trust in unions.

Why does age substantially reduce the difference between unstable and

TABLE 3. Trust in Unions: ANOVA Estimations of Differences Between Unstable and Stable Workers<sup>a</sup>

	Difference	$p > F$
Without controlling for other variables	0.28	0.0163
Controlling for occupation	0.25	0.0858
Controlling for firm size	0.28	0.1461
Controlling for sex	0.27	0.0449
Controlling for education	0.26	0.0778
Controlling for age	0.18	0.0039

<sup>a</sup> Difference between trust in unions for unstable workers and for stable workers.

stable workers? It was not the aim of our research to study the relationship between age and attitudes towards unions, but it is interesting to note that also in this case the relationship goes against the suppositions of the theories of change in workers' identities: younger people have better attitudes towards unions than their elders. As seen previously, the abrupt introduction of job instability in Spain has meant that the main victims have been more recent labour market entrants. This has very probably affected the socialization at work of younger generations, so in part both variables may be measuring the same thing.

### **Final Remarks: The Impact of Employment Flexibility on Political Attitudes Towards Work**

In this article, we have attempted to test whether the negative impact of labour market flexibility on labour organizations can be explained by a change in workers' attitudes brought about by flexibility. The Spanish case seems to show that it cannot, at least not as has been argued until now. Job instability does not make workers less collectivist, more competitive or more integrated in the value system of (post-)industrial capitalism: in fact, it has the opposite effect. Labour market flexibility makes working conditions more unstable and precarious, and therefore produces dissatisfaction, disintegration and anomie, and a more negative and critical attitude towards free enterprise and the prevailing system of work. We have seen that Spanish temporary workers are even slightly more in favour of trade unionism than permanent workers, which is remarkable considering their almost complete lack of contact with workers' organizations.

But why then has flexibility produced a weakening of trade unionism? If we are correct in our findings, why did it not produce the opposite result? If all else had remained the same, it probably would have done so. But as indicated in the introduction, there are other ways in which flexibility could adversely affect unions. Specifically, it increases the difficulties of constructing and sustaining collective organization, and it shifts the balance of power between workers and employers. Some of the evidence presented in this article points to the effects of the first of these two factors: we have seen how Spanish temporary workers have almost no contact with unions, because there is no union representation in their workplace. This makes it extremely difficult for such workers to articulate their interests collectively, even if they think this the best form of action. As for the shift in the balance of power between workers and employers, we have not explored this in the present research because it is very difficult to study the dynamics involved with survey data. But it is obvious that flexibility makes workers weaker against managers, and

thus more vulnerable to possible reprisals in the face of collective mobilization.

Thus, labour market flexibility produces discontent and negative attitudes towards free enterprise, and favourable attitudes towards mobilization and collective action. But at the same time, it makes it very difficult for these attitudes to crystallize in labour mobilization and organization. That is what the Spanish evidence shows clearly.

From a broader European perspective, these findings have important implications. The negative impact of temporary employment on union membership is almost universal in Europe, although nowhere as strong as in Spain. Here the rate of union membership among temporary workers is only a third of that for permanent ones; in the United Kingdom, it is a half; and the difference is even less in Sweden (Kjellberg, 2000: 570; Waddington, 2000: 616). In Belgium, the rate of unionization of temporary workers is even slightly higher than for permanent workers, although it is clearly an exceptional case (Van Gyes et al., 2000: 125). To explain these differences we would need a detailed comparative analysis that goes beyond the scope of this article. But what is important here is that the phenomenon of increased temporary employment is a general trend in Europe, as (except in Belgium) is its negative impact on union membership.

Spain is thus the extreme case within this European trend. Not only are there many more temporary workers, but the differences in working conditions between temporary and permanent workers are greater. It is in this sense that the findings of this article have important implications for the debate on the crisis of trade unions in Europe. Spain is the European country where the negative effects of flexibility on workers' attitudes towards unions should be strongest and clearest, but, as we have seen, they are not. In fact, the effect of insecurity on attitudes is the opposite of that generally predicted.

The Spanish case also shows that a very strong segmentation of the labour market does not necessarily produce negative attitudes towards trade unions among the 'outsiders'. This will depend on the prevailing model of trade unionism, and on the strategies adopted by unions regarding this segmentation. In Spain, trade unions are highly institutionalized organizations that depend very much on the homogeneity of the working class for their own survival, and therefore they seldom resort to strategies of exclusion and have opposed labour market dualism very strongly. For this reason, labour market dualism has not produced a confrontation between 'outsiders' and unions in Spain. Whether this will happen in other countries will depend on the national model of trade unionism and on union strategies.

The most important theoretical implication of these findings is that the cultural aspect of the crisis of trade unionism has probably been given too

much importance. The Spanish case shows that the negative effects of flexibilization policies for trade unionism are not due to the attitudes they produce, but to the extremely difficult organizational environment brought about by flexibility and to the changes it produces in the balance of power of the labour market. According to our findings, the focus of the debate should shift from culture and identity to issues of organization and resource mobilization.

The practical implication is that, as long as the recent changes in European labour markets continue, there has to be a fundamental transformation in the organizational model of trade unions. The current changes in the structure of employment are making the existing model increasingly inadequate, and that is simply the most important reason for the observed effects of labour market flexibility on union membership. The adaptation of the organizational model must take into account that the bond between the worker and the firm is much weaker for temporary (or in general, flexible) workers than for their permanent workmates. As Miguélez Lobo (2000: 523) has proposed, a possible solution to this problem in the Spanish case would be to strengthen representation structures not centred in the workplace, such as regional or local union organizations. The system of union elections should also be reconsidered: it cannot be a valid (or fair) system of labour representation if, as we have seen, 55 percent of unstable workers do not even have the opportunity of participating (because there is no election process in their workplaces). Such organizational transformation should be at the top of the agenda if unions want to organize the flexible segment of the labour market.

The study of the Spanish case permits a certain degree of optimism within the debate on the crisis of unionism, however. Flexibility does not do away with class consciousness and workers' critical attitudes towards the market system, as has often been suggested. On the contrary, it produces discontent and a set of disintegrated attitudes towards the system that can lay the foundations of a resurgence of conflict around production and a resurgence of labour movements. Whether it will end this way or not depends to a great extent on the ability of trade unions to overcome the organizational difficulties raised by flexibility and to mobilize the discontent that it creates.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Thanks to Anthony Ferner, Erik Olin Wright, Jonathan Zeitlin, Inés Calzada Gutiérrez, Richard Hyman, and the anonymous reviewers of the *European Journal of Industrial Relations* for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

## NOTES

- 1 Unless specified otherwise, throughout this article by 'flexibility' we mean numerical (and not functional) flexibility.
- 2 There is also a basic trade-off between numerical and functional flexibility. The former, as in Spain, makes labour cheap and disposable; the latter, as in Germany or Scandinavia, makes labour more productive.
- 3 This is especially true in southern Europe. Unions in northern Europe are often closer to the Anglo-Saxon model; nevertheless, they have traditionally been more inclusive than unions in Britain and the USA, and have proved successful in representing the 'outsider' workforce (Kjellberg, 2000: 570; Van Gyes et al., 2000: 125).
- 4 In fact this is not the case: the main demographic difference between temporary and permanent workers in Spain is age. As noted previously, the flexibilization of labour contracts affected only those entering the labour market after the mid-1980s.
- 5 One set of questions, not tabulated here, asked what features of work were considered very important: stability, training opportunities, responsibility and performing a useful function. The majority of respondents considered all four features very important; the proportion among insecure workers was slightly higher in the case of stability and slightly lower for the other three factors, but in no case was the difference more than 5 percent.
- 6 This result must be seen in the context of the Spanish model of unionism, in which by law collective bargaining affects all workers in its scope, whether or not they are unionized. In general, people do not join unions to be defended by them: unions will defend them anyway (Taboadela, 1993).

## REFERENCES

- Alonso, L.E. (1999) *Trabajo y ciudadanía*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Bell, D. (1973) *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bilbao, A. (1993) *Obreros y ciudadanos. La desestructuración de la clase obrera*. Madrid: Trotta.
- Bilbao, A. (1999) *El empleo precario*. Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.
- Bild, T. and Jorgensen, H. (1998) 'Do Unions Have a Future?', *Acta Sociologica* 41(3): 195–208.
- Boix, C. (1996) *Partidos políticos, crecimiento e igualdad*. Madrid: Alianza.
- Doeringer, P.B. and Piore, M.J. (1985) *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Dunn, R.G. (1998) *Identity Crises: A Social Critique of Postmodernity*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.
- Felstead, A. and Jewson, N. (1999) 'Flexible Labour and Non-Standard Employment: An Agenda of Issues', in A. Felstead and N. Jewson (eds) *Global Trends in Flexible Labour*, pp. 1–20. London: Macmillan.
- Ferner, A. and Hyman, R. (1998) 'Towards European Industrial Relations?', in A. Ferner and R. Hyman (eds) *Changing Industrial Relations in Europe*, pp. xi–xxvi. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Heery, E. and Salmon, J. (2000) 'The Insecurity Thesis', in E. Heery and J. Salmon (eds) *The Insecure Workforce*, pp. 1–38. London: Routledge.
- Hyman, R. (1999) 'An Emerging Agenda for Trade Unions?' International Institute for Labour Studies Working Paper, Geneva.
- Jimeno, J. and Toharia, L. (1994) *Unemployment and Labour Market Flexibility: Spain*. Geneva: ILO.
- Jordan, T. (1994) *Reinventing Revolution*. London: Avebury.
- Kjellberg, A. (2000) 'The Multitude of Challenges Facing Swedish Trade Unions', in J. Waddington and R. Hoffman (eds) *Trade Unions in Europe. Facing Challenges and Searching for Solutions*, pp. 529–73. Brussels: ETUI.
- Lash, S. and Urry, J. (1987) *The End of Organized Capitalism*. London: Blackwell.
- Martínez Lucio, M. (1992) 'Spain: Constructing Institutions and Actors in a Context of Change', in A. Ferner and R. Hyman (eds) *Industrial Relations in the New Europe*, pp. 482–528. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Martínez Lucio, M. and Blyton, P. (1995) 'Constructing the Post-Fordist State? The Politics of Labour Market Flexibility in Spain', *West European Politics* 18: 340–60.
- Miguélez Lobo, F. (2000) 'The Modernization of Trade Unions in Spain', in J. Waddington and R. Hoffman (eds) *Trade Unions in Europe. Facing Challenges and Searching for Solutions*, pp. 499–528. Brussels: ETUI.
- Muñoz de Bustillo Llorente, R. (2002) 'Spain and the Neoliberal Paradigm'. Center for Economic Policy Analysis Working Paper, New York.
- Piore, M.J. (1980) 'Dualism as a Response to Flux and Uncertainty', in M.J. Piore and S. Berger (eds) *Dualism and Discontinuity in Industrial Societies*, pp. 23–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Polavieja, J.G. (2001) 'Labour Market Dualisation and Trade Union Involvement in Spain', in G. Van Gyes, H. De Witte and P. Pasture (eds) *Can Class Still Unite?*, pp. 129–69. London: Avebury.
- Richards, A. and Polavieja, J.G. (1997) 'Trade Unions, Unemployment and Working Class Fragmentation in Spain'. Juan March Institute Working Paper 1997/112, Madrid.
- Rubery, J. (1988) 'Structured Labour Markets, Worker Organizations and Low Pay', in A. Giddens and D. Held (eds) *Classes, Power and Conflict*, pp. 330–48. London: Macmillan.
- Taboadela, O. (1993) 'La afiliación sindical'. Ph.D. thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid.
- Thirkell, J. and Vickerstaff, S. (1999) 'Trade Unions and the Politics of Transformation in Central and East Europe'. Paper presented to the ESRC seminar Restructuring Employment and Work in East-Central Europe, Sussex.
- Thompson, E.P. (1967) *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Penguin.
- Van Gyes, G., De Witte, H. and Van Der Hallen, P. (2000) 'Belgian Trade Unions in the 1990s: Does Strong Today Mean Strong Tomorrow?', in J. Waddington and R. Hoffman (eds) *Trade Unions in Europe. Facing Challenges and Searching for Solutions*, pp. 105–43. Brussels: ETUI.

- Waddington, J. (2000) 'Recovering from the Neo-Liberal Assault?', in J. Waddington and R. Hoffman (eds) *Trade Unions in Europe. Facing Challenges and Searching for Solutions*, pp. 575-627. Brussels: ETUI.
- Yin, R.K. (1994) *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**ENRIQUE FERNÁNDEZ MACÍAS** is Research Fellow in the Department of Applied Economics of the University of Salamanca. His research is in the fields of industrial relations, the sociology of work and class analysis. ADDRESS: Departamento de Economía Aplicada, Facultad de Derecho, Campus 'Miguel de Unamuno', Universidad de Salamanca, 37071 Salamanca, Spain. [e-mail: efm@usal.es]