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**THE SHAPING OF INNOVATION AND THE ROLES OF WORKERS IN THE
BRAZILIAN TRUCK INDUSTRY**

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The paper proposed will analyses the transformation in workers' participation in the innovation processes in the Brazilian truck industry, during the 1990s. We start by questioning the "invisibility" of workers' active roles in most Innovation Studies, which seems to be the correlate to the approach of "impact of technology on labour" which is present in the largest part of industrial relations field. In the Brazilian case, previous research (late 80s) showed that the prevailing organisation of work hindered the incorporation of workers' knowledge and experience in the process of innovation in industry. Looking into the Brazilian truck industry in the late 90's is a good chance to re-assess the question, as a considerable amount of design and (minor) innovation activities is carried out in it.

The paper is based on the case study developed at Mercedes-Benz truck plant in São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil, and it is offered as a contribution for the "work package" related to the analysis of productive relations. It intends also to present an useful approach for further comparative researches. The context shows the truck industry and the leading firm under new economic conditions, with an old plant that is remarkable for its complexity and for the great level of trade-union & workers council influence.

The case study is then developed in order to debate the innovation process in the workplaces, in a series of levels: decision-making, implementation of new organisational arrangements, and the continuous change of work micro-processes. The roles of trade-union

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leaders, worker councils representatives and direct workers are analysed in each level; their inter-relations with the firm hierarchy and the new structures of innovation management also appear in the main picture.

The transformation of the institutional and operative workers roles is analysed as a political engineering process, contributing to shaping innovation in both structural and daily basis, throughout conflicts and ambiguities. The new situation at Mercedes-Benz is described as “institutionalised inclusion” of the workers within the innovation process, opposed to the traditional trajectory recently done by important companies in Brazil, implementing unilateral designed programmes that considers a basic “instrumental” workers’ presence on the innovation dynamics.

At the same time, the workers’ role within the innovation process has shown progress and limits, either in terms of democratic industrial relations or considering the development of technological capabilities and industrial competitiveness. The limits are also shown by the parallel situation observed at one of the newest truck plants in Brazil, the Volkswagen Resende. ///