

Corinthians' democracy and unionism: the narrative of the integration between Corinthians' movement and the football players' Labor Union

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Abstract: This paper reconstructs the narrative of the integration between the football players who participated in the so-called Corinthians' Democracy and the Professional Athletes Union, in order to explain how that movement influenced union activity in the class. Based on a historical survey of articles published by newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* and *Placar* magazine, and a semi-structured interview with player Wladimir, we reconstituted the narrative of that integration and discussed the labor union activity of those subjects. Thus, participation of Corinthians's players in the Union expanded the demands of that experience to the whole class and enabled the creation of new demands in a relatively more autonomous context.

Keywords: labor unions; working conditions; sports.

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the narrative of “Corinthian’s Democracy” players integration into the Union of Athletes of the State of São Paulo (SAPESP) in order to understand how that movement influenced unionism in that class of workers.

The so-called “Corinthian’s Democracy” movement corresponds to the two terms of President Waldemar Pires ahead of Sport Club Corinthians Paulista, in March 1981-March 1985. In those two terms,

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less authoritarian forms of management of the club and the football team were established, in which players could take part in decision-making processes.¹

This study shows one side of the reach of Corinthian's Democracy, which sought to expand the group's activities for the whole class of football players. Thus, we seek to answer the following questions: Were the discussion and achievements of Corinthians' experience restricted to a select group of the club's "famous" professional players? How were those subjects able to expand the range of their actions?

The debate proposed by this article seeks to understand how football players in Corinthian's Democracy joined political movements, especially trade unions, in the state of São Paulo, discussing their work, career and life conditions. Understanding Corinthian's Democracy as a product and agent of its historical time, we situate it in the context of the first half of the 1980s, when emerging social movements fought for democratization of society and the end of military rule. They included the so-called New Unionism, carrying out major strikes and gaining visibility, influencing political movements other than those focused on São Paulo's ABC region (SADER, 2002). It is in this context that reflections emerge about how players can be political subjects to intervene against Brazil's football structure in order to change it – something that until then had been the privilege of an elite of club and federation leaders² or even the military government, but not of the protagonists of the sporting spectacle.

This analysis on the participation of Corinthians' players in the Union entails reflection about existence and the possibilities of

¹There are distinct views on the meaning of Corinthians's Democracy. Its different subjects include those who argued that the movement was about participation in decision-making processes, the votes that took place in the football department and the attempt to elect players for the club's Executive Board. There were also those who related it to the rights that were demanded, such as those of speech and political participation or voluntary "concentration" (players locked up in isolation a few days before matches). One of the coaches denied the existence of dialogue and democracy at the club. Therefore, we understand Corinthians's Democracy as a complex and plural movement that carried several views about its very existence (MARTINS; REIS, 2014).

²Professionalization of football in Brazil created a conflict that was solved by accommodating a football elite among its officials, and creating the so-called "pass" (transfer rights) to link players to clubs. Therefore, although allowed anyone to devote themselves to football, professionalization also put players in a position not to participate in football's governing process (DAMO, 2007).

the movement for autonomy at the club, which declined right after Sócrates's departure and came to an end after Adilson Monteiro Alves's³ defeat as a candidate for Corinthians's presidency in 1985. The movement largely depended on the board for support, so the threat to its continuity was always conditional on Adilson's dismissal.⁴ For us, that is evidence of the movement's weakness. It did not hold in itself the autonomy of football players, which could have been reached or matured with a more solid action by those subjects within the Union. As we will demonstrate in this article, that debate was present among the movement's very subjects and players in that historic time.

2 METHODOLOGICAL PATH

To understand the actions of Corinthians's players at the Union, we used a historical survey based on press articles on those facts during the period of Corinthian's Democracy, from March 1981 to March 1985. Our research was developed in that historical period in newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* and *Placar* magazine.⁵ Those media were chosen because they cover political aspects of football, regarding players' organization. The newspapers were used to highlight different opinions on the subject and to emphasize the lines of the subject in its historical time in order to understand Corinthian's Democracy process. The choice of those two sources in our research served to organize recurring ideas and underscore

³Adilson Monteiro Alves took over Corinthians' football department in November 1981, when the club was undergoing a streak of poor results. He was a 35-year-old sociologist with no experience in football, who was appointed because his father was the club's vice-president. He says he took over the department seeking to talk to players and coaches about their future, and that is how he led the department, even with ups and downs and contradictions, until he lost the election in March 1985.

⁴Especially after Sócrates left, which coincides with poor results, Adilson Monteiro Alves's position was threatened on several occasions, as well as the "democracy" itself.

⁵The research covers the period from March 1981 to March 1985. There are only two exceptions sought in *Placar* from previous periods. One, from 1979, on the São Paulo Union; the other is a 1980 special edition of the magazine on a Brazilian Football Census. We sought those editions because they have been mentioned in articles of the period studied. The following editions of *Placar* were used: 459; 675; 677; 694; 697; 703; 720; of newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, we used articles from the sports session of the following editions: April 3, 1983; July 21, 1983; June 13, 1984; June 14, 1984; September 2, 1984; October 20, 1984; November 1, 1984; November 2, 1984.

conflicting opinions on the subject, in order to trace the narrative of that integration based on how it gained public visibility. Therefore, although newspapers did not portray all events of that integration, they show us public aspects of the public debates and struggles undertaken during that period. Such events also gained major notoriety on the press due to the historical context, marked by unionism on the rise and highly present on the news.

In addition, we conducted a semi-structured interview⁶ (NEGRINE, 2004) with former player Wladimir, who has been a leader of the players' union for three terms – 1978-1980, 1980-1984, and was elected its president in 1984. That interview was important to understand Corinthian's Democracy and its subjects' relationship with the Union movement. Finally, we placed the interview and the articles in context in order to examine them in the light of the sociological debate about football and political participation/union activity.

3 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FOOTBALL PLAYER PROFESSION

In Corinthians's Democracy, players made some achievements, such as voluntary "concentration", the right to manage their free time, the possibility of intervening in their own work process, as well as respect for the right of union organization and political participation, either inside the club or regarding society itself. These achievements were obtained especially after Adilson Monteiro Alves appointment as director of football. After the defeat of the ticket that would continue Corinthian's Democracy in 1985 and the arrival of a new board and more authoritarian coaches, players gradually lost the rights they had achieved.

During Corinthian's Democracy, players raised issues that were not related simply to "inclusion" but also to "the right to effectively participate in the very definition of the system", that is, a new form of citizenship, something forged in Brazil in the 1980s,

⁶The procedures used in the study are consistent with the ethical principles guiding Resolutions 196/96 and 251/97 of the National Health Council.

together with other social movements fighting for democratization of society (DAGNINO, 2004, p. 109). Therefore, the movement reached recognition levels beyond Corinthians's squad, expanding to several clubs that wanted to adopt similar models. That was the case, for example, of Sport Club Internacional, whose president said he implemented Corinthians's model, but did not allow players to express themselves politically (SOUZA, 1984). Clube de Regatas Vasco da Gama's football director Paulo Angioni (1983) also pointed out the existence of an alleged democracy within what was also called "the Vasco Project". Specifically, what was seen as an element of that democracy was the freedom of expression for all political groups within the club (1983). These cases are examples of times when Corinthian's Democracy influenced other clubs and other players. However, what is evident in those examples, as in other cases (OS TÉCNICOS, 1983), is that Corinthian's Democracy influenced other clubs, but in a limited way, with regard to players' organization, since that influence had little to do with the main achievements of Corinthians's squad. Furthermore, the expansion of some of the movement's ideas was limited to First League clubs of major football hubs. Thus, football coach and journalist João Saldanha's reflection at the time was a warning to players:

[...] As for Corinthian's Democracy, I recognize players' warning cry. This can be the starting point for democracy to reach all Brazilian players. In the country, that profession is still a means rather than an end. In 90% of cases, players are very poor workers who run the country in search of temporary work, with no guarantees or security. The "pass law" is not regulated, unions are not organized. That is what players must fight for. (OS TÉCNICOS, 1983, p. 58)

Saldanha's opinion corroborates Florestan Fernandes's views on the democratic transition. According to the author, the key issue for workers would be achieving autonomy through institutions disconnected from control by the dictatorship. That meant fighting not for bourgeois representative democracy, but strengthening the "conditions for the proletariat's self-organization, self-awareness

and self-assertion – which sets the reality of proletarian democracy within bourgeois order, so closed and autocratic” (FERNANDES, 1980, p. 29). For the author, in businesses, it translates as the establishment of factory committees; in the union movement, it translates as free and independent workers’ organizations at the several levels necessary, building a strategy according to which “workers should move to become socially valid, putting a stop to the paternalistic-bossy tradition of tacit ‘civil death’ and replacing it with a new tradition of active, uncompromising and militant class solidarity” (FERNANDES, 1980, p. 30).

For Saldanha (OS TÉCNICOS, 1983), football players as a class did not present themselves as a homogeneous block of workers. In addition to those famous players who were on newspapers’ front pages, the class included a mass of workers around the country under different insecure working conditions. Although playing football had been considered a profession since 1933 (DAMO, 2007), its regulation was still precarious. This was provided by Law No. 6354 of 1976, known as the “Pass Law”. As the name implies, it was based on the “pass” principle, which stated that an athlete could only be transferred to another club upon consent of the club holding rights to his contract, setting an exchange value for that. It was a source of income for the club, turning players into part of their net worth. Moreover, such legislation guaranteed few rights for players (BOUDENS, 2002). On the contrary, it tied their lives to the wills of their clubs so that challenging them could have a negative impact on their entire careers. This sustained the paternalistic ideology of football.

In 1983, *Placar* magazine said that football had accounted for 1.4% of Brazil’s GDP in the mid-1970s, that is, there was a large market related to that sport (VAMOS, 1983). In 1980, that vein of cultural industry included 7,892 professional players distributed over 425 clubs.⁷ Brazilian football already saw territorial

⁷Revista Placar, 1º censo do futebol brasileiro, 17/10/1980. Caderno Especial. The article did not inform on the research method used. However, it was the only work of its kind found at the time. It suggests that data were collected on clubs from three leagues in every state in the country.

concentration of the jobs of those workers, since 2,641 players – about a third of the total – were from the state of São Paulo.

Regarding players' salaries, *Placar's* data in 1980 showed inequality as a result of the leagues where players worked. Those working in major teams (first league) – about 17.4% of the universe of players – earned Cr\$ 31,840.00 a month on average;⁸ those of medium-size teams – about 19.4% – earned Cr\$ 15,290.00;⁹ while small-team players – about 62.8% – earned Cr\$ 7,750.00 on average.¹⁰

Therefore, the footballer profession went beyond those who played the first league of major championships, but:

The density of male representations associated with the practice of football (...) hides the ills of the profession: most players are waged workers, their careers are short, their peak is early, their reconversion is unlikely (DAMO, 2007, p. 24).

The seductive power of football masks for young people the fact that those who can achieve that level represent a minimum percentage of those entering the career. As pointed out by Arlei Damo (2007), it is a very precarious career, worsened by a short duration and minimum possibility of converting into another career after it ends. Against this backdrop of huge inequalities, João Saldanha says that achievements had to be expanded to the whole class and that entailed action at the athletes' union.

4 PARTICIPATION BY CORINTHIANS'S DEMOCRACY PLAYERS IN THE UNION

The narrative of participation by Corinthian's Democracy players in the Union of Athletes of the State of São Paulo (SAPESP)

⁸Values updated in that work according to the IPC-FIPE index would amount to R\$ 1,622.66. This amount would correspond to about six times the minimum wage in October 1981 values.

⁹Updated value: R\$ 779.23. About three times the minimum wage, according to values of that time.

¹⁰Updated value: R\$ 394.96. This value would amount to little over one minimum wage according to values of that time.

should start with Wladimir, who had been part of the Union since 1978, when Palhinha was its president.¹¹ In the following term, when Valdir Peres was the President in 1980, Wladimir was the Union's treasurer and in 1984, he was elected president. In addition to Wladimir – the member of Corinthians's movement who was most active at the Union, other players took part in public debates about trade unionism in football, like Sócrates, Daniel Gonzalez, Leão Casagrande and Juninho. Of these, during the period of Corinthian's Democracy, Juninho and Casagrande were union leaders – both, as well as Wladimir himself, were members of the Workers' Party, showing political activity beyond Corinthians. Casagrande, being a Union leader, was the subject of a controversy within the club when Corinthians officials wanted to dismiss him, but that was not legally possible since he was a Union member.¹²

During Corinthian's Democracy, the Union of athletes gained high publicity in the media, which makes it interesting to reconstruct its activity, since it allows observing the connections during the integration of the experience at the Union. Until then, SAPESP was quite shy in its actions, with low membership – between 800 and 1,200 members, out of about 3,000 professional players in São Paulo (JOGADORES, 1983). This small representation was justified as a problem of Union management: they would not be interested in seeking many members to strengthen the organization. In 1983, former Botafogo player and coach Zé Mario said that the Union's problems were the result of its presidency's lack of interest, administrative vision and competence. He said there was a big difference between the Unions in São Paulo and Rio de

¹¹Palhinha also played for Corinthians at the time and, according to Wladimir, he invited him to join the Union. Palhinha was elected its vice president in Leão's ticket (as president) in 1978. However, since the latter was transferred from São Paulo to Minas Gerais, Palhinha took over his place (CARDOSO, Maurício. Um líder paulista, uai. *Revista Placar*, no. 459, 9/2/1979, p. 6-8).

¹²Due to a temporary leave of Coach Jorge Vieira, who was ill, Casagrande declared that he was no longer the team's coach and that fitness coach Helio Maffia had replaced him. Jorge Vieira then tried to exclude Casagrande from a match, but was not supported by Adilson Monteiro Alves. The coach resigned. During the episode, the club's board decided to punish Casagrande, offering him for sale, against the will of the player who wanted to remain in the club. Since he was a Union leader, Corinthians could not sell him, as his position guaranteed his job (NINGUÉM pode mandar Casagrande embora. *Folha de São Paulo*, p. 26, June 13, 1984; BORGE, Ari. Lula com Sócrates defende o sindicalista Casagrande, *Folha de São Paulo*, p. 28, June 14, 1984).

Janeiro, since almost all the players were members of the latter (JOGADORES, 1983).

In the same year, during the administration of goalkeeper Valdir Peres, Corinthian's Democracy members publicized discussions about the direction of the Union. Sócrates, one of the main leaders of the movement, criticized the organization's president, saying that it had shown no interest in communicating with its base. At the time, Sócrates spoke about the importance of the Union as a tool to create an action plan with broad player participation and which represented the demands of the entire class. The main demand he made – and which, according to him, was neglected by the Union – was a proposal to abolish the Pass Law, but seek to resolve the contradictions present in the most precarious levels of the class, so as not to advocate a change that was detrimental to most players (SÓCRATES, 1983, p. 26).

Sócrates became interested in unionism due to the success of Corinthian's Democracy, which made him glimpse the possibility of extending that project beyond the Union:

[...] I've always tried to change something in the structure of football through the micro-world of my club, but I never got any return. I ended up frustrated and discouraged to extend that struggle to a larger universe. But in 1982 we were successful, the group continued to work to improve the environment a little and break up that conformism, that reactionarism that prevails in the structure we live every day. After succeeding, even partially, at Corinthians, I felt encouraged to fly higher, for a project that would find problems and their solutions at the basis of the class. (SÓCRATES, 1983, p. 26).

The problem of the Union's representation was part of Sócrates' criticism to the organization board, directed mainly at the fact that despite the talk about open doors, it did not reach to players to understand the demands of the class. According to Sócrates, professionals had less guarantees in small clubs. To consider changes in the Pass Law, he insisted it would be necessary to travel

around towns to see the problems of smaller clubs, where the contradictions that the Union needed to solve were (SÓCRATES, 1983, p. 26).

Besides the issue of representation, another aspect of Sócrates's criticism to Valdir Peres's administration was the union's indifference to labor movements that occurred in 1983. In July of that year, after a day of general strike was called, some players demonstrated against the match, preferring to postpone the matches that occurred on that date. Sócrates and Casagrande favored athletes' participation in the general strike. "No playing or training. This should come from our Union", which did not happen (CORINTHIANS, 1983, p. 24). In an interview to *Placar*, Sócrates criticized the Union for not acting at the time, claiming that the organization should join the class (SOU, 1983: 19). The movement was criticizing the way the Union did not get involved in workers' struggles in Brazil. Let us not forget that one of the trademarks of Corinthian's Democracy was the engagement of its athletes in the movement for "Direct Elections Now".

The point of greatest integration of Corinthian's Democracy to the Union occurred when Wladimir became president, together with Juninho and Casagrande. In line with the discussions arising from the New Unionism (SADER, 2002), Wladimir wanted to "turn football into an efficient Union structure that could put an end to club officials' paternalism and political interference in the profession". He said that there were difficulties, especially that "unfortunately, the essence of professional football is confrontation; one's defeat is another's victory" (WLADIMIR, 1984, p. 27). According to him, "We exist to play against someone. And it created certain animosity, certain distance, actually. So, our profession has this peculiarity, this distinction"¹³ and that made it difficult to unite the class.

For Wladimir, although there was some progress in the relationship between players and club officials, paternalism

¹³Wladimir, in an interview.

remained high in professional football, “but unfortunately it also occurs in other areas such as politics, where the government solves everything. We have to act, to fight. That happens often at the Union” (WLADIMIR, 1984, p. 27). The player’s words corroborate studies about Brazil’s political culture, whose citizenship history shows that it has been *granted* because it is based on the idea of rights as gifts, as a result of exchanges under subservient relations (SALES, 1994), so that the so-called “paternalism” when dealing with football players is not exclusive of that sphere, being present in the initial shaping of citizenship in the country. Santos (1979) states that citizenship in Brazil emerged in the 1930s, in a *regulated* way, highlighting the strong role of the State in defining who was a citizen, according to which only those who worked and whose profession was recognized by the State had rights. So “paternalism” is present in Brazilian political culture, understood both as a concession and as strong regulation by an agent “superior” in relations. When Wladimir joined the Union, his idea was to break away from that political culture, what Corinthians’s Democracy did to some extent by giving voice to football players and taking part in Brazilian democratization movements.

One of Wladimir’s administration’s measures to strengthen the Union was a campaign to increase the number of members. It went from 600 to 3 thousand members, which was just the first step in that process, since he thought that raising players’ awareness was necessary. To advance in discussions on working conditions and expand Union action, his administration created a newspaper for the class and intended to expand its action to strengthen the legal department and establish health care, especially for unemployed players. According to Wladimir,

[...] Brazilian football needs [in 1984] restructuring, it has to be seen as business activity and not to live only out of money from matches. We are also working with the kids so they have no illusions when they become professionals, so they don’t think that they will be necessarily a Zico or a Sócrates (WLADIMIR, 1984, p. 27).

One of the most important issues, according Wladimir (O DESAFIO, 1984), was the Pass Law. He noted that

[...] in the current structure of Brazilian football, “free pass” is synonymous with job insecurity. We think that the Pass Law has to be revoked, but as a new form of relationship between employer and employee. We have to start with the lower leagues. When players started at a club, they would be free to accept that relation or not (O DESAFIO, 1984, p. 23).

This struggle is a point of intersection between Corinthian’s Democracy and Union’s platform. That is because, as much as the former did not approach clashes related to “pass” when acting in the Union, that perspective entered the horizon, as shown in Wladimir’s and Sócrates’s speeches. Interestingly, according to both, the debate on the Pass Law took place under the need to reconcile it to the struggle for better working conditions – steps taken within the Corinthians squad.¹⁴

Moreover, Wladimir’s words show concern for the precarious nature of football players’ careers, saying that the pass would grant security that the free contract would not necessarily provide. However, for him, the false security provided by the pass-based relation was no reason to advocate it. So, ensuring career stability and job security in the free contract would depend on the Union’s struggle for basic rights and minimum conditions in the profession, which provided for the full realization of the right to work as a footballer. Therefore, strengthening the class and the athletes’ Union would be critical to extinguish the Pass Law without worsening working conditions.

¹⁴In this sense, Corinthians’s Democracy, although it is understood as a movement seeking the end of paternalism in Brazilian football (against conservatism so present in that environment), failed to perceive and point the Pass Law as crucial, since that agenda did not gain relevance. The question of whether players should do pre-match “concentration” was more important. They even discussed their own work process, to the possibility of choosing one of them to manage it as a coach. However, players in that movement did not oppose such a naturalized process as the pass-property of a soccer player, a point that no leader would touch, in order to build modern relations in football. Thus, although players raised the issue at the union, especially in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro state Unions, Corinthians’s Democracy failed to reach an autonomous organizational level that allowed enhancing that struggle against something so ingrained and so naturalized as well as archaic: the Pass Law.

As part of that Union platform to advocate better working conditions, another demand of Wladimir's administration ahead of the Union, at an interview with one of the authors in 2012, was a minimum wage, which did not succeed according to the player:

[W]e wanted a floor wage for all footballer classes, from basic to professional. We wanted to end the Pass Law. Those were our biggest fights, our greatest desires. The floor ended up with no consensus, because of the individuality of each one – the individual value of each (in an interview to one of the authors in 2012).

When he was Union president, they challenged the Paulista Football Federation in 1984, when Palmeiras player Mario Sérgio was caught in doping tests. Palmeiras officials tried to postpone his trial so that he could continue playing matches without being punished until the end of São Paulo's state championship. In addition to offering its legal structure to defend the player, the Union president also advocated stopping the championship until the trial took place, since proceeding without that interruption meant not assigning validity to the drug test and discrediting the entire class that did not use prohibited substances. According to the player, he even threatened to organize a player strike if the president of São Paulo Federation did not act:

He underestimated our capacity, and we'd really stop. We did not stop because they tried Mario Sérgio. The guy was under suspicion; the class was under suspicion. He was tried and convicted. I thought of everything, I was meeting with the federation's president; they actually served clubs' interests, they don't give a damn about athletes. So I said: 'here's the thing, Mr. Marin, we'll stop the championship'. And he said 'no'. So they tried him (Wladimir, in an interview to one of the authors, in 2012).

That episode had the support of Corinthians's board, which caused the work of the Union to be criticized for defending the club's interests (CORINTHIANS, 1984; O SÃO PAULO, 1984).

This demonstrates one of the controversial points of the integration between Corinthian's Democracy and the union. Therefore, even though Corinthians's experience was an example to be followed by other clubs, which would ensure its radicalization and its transformative potential, from the point of view of players' rights, it should be autonomous regarding the board, a controversial issue considering its heavy reliance on Adilson Monteiro Alves.

Players' autonomous organization could cause them to escape from the logic of regulated or granted participation. Taking that into account was crucial, because if the club's board generally supported and even encouraged¹⁵ participation in Unions, to highlight the conflict of interest between players and clubs would demand strength and independence. Only in this way players would not be hostages of the agreement or the limits imposed by clubs' officials and could question them and move beyond their management project. The Pass Law, for example, was a demand that did not have the support of officials and depended on the class's force to impose it.

An article on *Placar* shows a debate among several football players about the meaning of Corinthian's Democracy. Those favorable to the experience include Palhinha, who attributed the success of the experiment "to leader Adilson Monteiro Alves's open mind" (DEMOCRACIA, 1983, p. 18). He acknowledged the dependence on Alves's leading role for the existence of Corinthian's Democracy. This shows a sense of granted participation, overshadowing players' achievement and recognition of rights. However, it should be noted that once that space was created, it did not serve to show subservience to club officials, but was disputed by players, even though its origin preserved a logic limited to elements that did not interfere directly with officials' management plans. That is why Atlético Mineiro's player Reinaldo reaffirmed that, for the experiment to succeed, "clubs had to stop being managed emotionally and our Unions had to gain strength

¹⁵Adilson Monteiro Alves encourages players' political participation, whether in the movements of the "Direct Elections Now" or in the Union (SANTOS, 1990).

and representation [...]. The big problem of democracy in football nowadays is the fact that players can't fight in an organized way" (DEMOCRACIA, 1983, p. 18).

This narrative brings out the organizational difficulties faced by the Union of professional athletes. First, it shows how renowned players typically move away from their own professional class. They can have their skills recognized, while for most players that possibility is very small, given the precarious nature of their jobs and the leagues where they play, which are very distant from those at the top of show business and the country's major sports competitions. Those who got to establish themselves in the profession think it was due to their merits. Thus, we relate that elite stratum of professional players with middle-class professions in which work is a "non-manual" task, not in the physiological sense of the term, but for requiring "gift" as well as built and acquired knowledge. In that stratum, participation in Unions is small, because those subjects credit their wage and professionals gains predominantly to individual merit (BOITO JUNIOR, 2004, p. 223-225). For workers fond of that meritocratic ideology, union struggles would be required only for those "who have to compensate the lack of gifts and personal merits and the simple and degraded work they do by resorting to the use of collective force" (BOITO JUNIOR 2004, p. 225). However, despite producing that particular isolation effect, "meritocratism" can be linked to unionism in that it "shifts the emphasis from individual merit to the profession", based on the defense of a given profession in the social hierarchy (BOITO JUNIOR, 2004, p. 228). But that form of demand alone does not include most players, who have little recognition in the profession. Therefore, although it is important that the most famous players participate, it is essential to keep in mind that the class of players is larger than that, so that few can establish themselves. That raises the need to conceive action that focuses on the class as a whole and, therefore move away from meritocratic unionism, because it cannot be sufficiently comprehensive to focus on the issues that are relevant for the entire class.

5 FINAL REMARKS

Corinthian's Democracy both encouraged and limited player participation, given their dependency on club's officials and the management project undertaken by the club. The integration of Corinthian's Democracy to the Professional Athletes Union presented two possibilities: extending achievements and political debates made at Corinthians to all Brazilian players, and a concrete process that went beyond the limits allowed by Corinthians's management. For them to become reality, the Union had to be strengthened as a vehicle to convey the desire for better working conditions, which many players saw in Corinthians's movement.

As much as Corinthian's Democracy created conditions for players to speak within the club and therefore provided better working conditions, the movement did not achieve the class's autonomy to advance in directions that allowed approaching issues hindered by their dependence on the board and reach the entire class of athletes. The experience sustained permanent tension between integration to new Unionism – claims for new citizenship, contrary to the archaic ideals of paternalism – and maintaining a form of regulated participation – just like that forged by Brazilian citizens in early days. Therefore, going to the Union meant expanding the experience of Corinthian's Democracy as modernization of labor relations, the right to negotiate and to be a “free” contract worker. The Union should be the place for creating that autonomy.

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