

The University Work Service. A politicizing experience under Francoism, 1950-1970

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Abstract

This paper addresses the politicizing experience that more than 13,000 Spanish students went through during the time they were members of the Servicio Universitario del Trabajo (SUT, University Work Service), between 1950 and 1970. The idea behind the creation of the SUT was to launch a series of work camps that would place university students in direct contact with the working world to share labour and life conditions. In doing so, FET-JONS, the Spanish single-party, aimed at refuting the Marxist class struggle that was considered to have caused the war and empower brotherhood among students, workers, and peasants within the harmonious ideal of a unified, disciplined, national community. The SUT project was built on the totalizing, fascist, and Catholic-rooted humanism of a 'new man' who would eradicate the intellectual egotism and bourgeois comfort of the students through close contact with labourers. Workers would then no longer be seen as an enemy to combat, but as men to redeem and from whom to learn the value of sacrifice and hard manual labour. By resorting to ex SUT members' testimonies, several journals published by the SUT and documents housed at the General Archive of the Spanish Central Administration, this paper shows how participation in these activities exposed many university students from bourgeois families – which had mostly been on the winning side of Civil War – to the injustices of the social structure hidden beneath the triumphalist rhetoric of the dictatorship. Finally, the paper concludes that the SUT invigorated a pre-political critical conscience in many university students which constituted the first step on a path of political commitment to opposing Franco.

Author information

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Monday, 21 June - Session 9 - **9,00-10,30 CET (Webex)** - Panel – *“Political Participation” in Democracy History: A Contested and Ever-Changing Concept and Practice?*

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