The Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing invites you to a seminar

The Thai automobile industry and its workers: a new “Detroit in East Asia” with “Detroit job and wages”? 

Where: N72_-2.10 (Nathan Campus)  
When: Monday 7th July – 10.30am

1543 industrial employees from the private sector, among them 288 employees from major assemblers and auto part suppliers, have been interviewed regarding their education and professional trajectories. With the same questionnaire, 2021 workers from the informal sector were also interviewed. The data collected allow comparison between the automobile industry and other sectors. Qualitative interviews with Human Resource managers were also conducted. Several visits of automobile plants have been done to observe the labour process. The purpose of this present communication is to compare workers from the automobile industry with workers from the rest of the industry regarding job tenure, career, wages, and benefit. Our evidence shows that automobile firms are trying to structure internal labour markets by organising a mix of personal career ladder, seniority wage, attractive benefits in exchange of very long working hours and extensive labour flexibility. This strategy is hampered by the national context: full employment makes other good job opportunities available for skilled workers and managers. Bad quality of education makes internal training more costly. Geographical distance of industrial parks from Bangkok. Trade unions are sometimes active and successful in getting wage or bonus increases. Despite these difficulties, the Thai automobile industry is growing and exporting successfully proving that internal labour market in a second tier industrial country like Thailand is still a bargain.

Bruno Jetin

*Bruno Jetin is PhD in economics, assistant professor at the University of Paris Nord (France), and presently detached at the Research Institute for Development (IRD, France). He works since October 2005 as researcher at the Centre for Education and Labour Studies (CELS, Chiang Mai University, Thailand). At the CELS he took part of a research programme on “Labour regime, education and skills in Thailand” financed by the National Research Council of Thailand (NRCT) from 2004 to 2006, where he has extended the field research to the Thai automobile industry.*