



Cornell University  
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School  
**DigitalCommons@ILR**

---

Articles and Chapters

ILR Collection


---

2007

## Conclusion to *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-Border Campaigns*

Kate Bronfenbrenner  
Cornell University, [klb23@cornell.edu](mailto:klb23@cornell.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles>

 Part of the [International and Comparative Labor Relations Commons](#), and the [Unions Commons](#)

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ILR Collection at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact [hlmdigital@cornell.edu](mailto:hlmdigital@cornell.edu).

---

# Conclusion to *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-Border Campaigns*

## **Abstract**

[Excerpt] What the cases in this book show is that the world's unions have a greater potential than most realize to take on the most powerful corporations and win. These cases also show how difficult that can be. It requires enormous effort, creativity, and a willingness to take risks and reach across differences. But going from individual cases to something bigger requires something else as well. As difficult as times are for workers in the Global North, and as much as the wealth accumulated by global capital comes mostly from taking enormous profits at the expense of all workers, part of the reason that capital is able to do what it does is that hundreds of years of colonialism and imperialism have restrained workers' power, wages, and labor costs. This not only has made many a CEO and corporate shareholder very rich but has helped make a middle-class lifestyle affordable for millions and millions of workers in the Global North that would not have been possible otherwise.

## **Keywords**

globalization, labor movement, organizing, cross-border strategies

## **Disciplines**

International and Comparative Labor Relations | Labor Relations | Unions

## **Comments**

### **Suggested Citation**

Bronfenbrenner, K. (2007). Conclusion [Electronic version]. In K. Bronfenbrenner (Ed.), *Global unions: Challenging transnational capital through cross-border campaigns* (pp. 213-225). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

## **Required Publisher Statement**

© [Cornell University Press](#). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

# CONCLUSION

KATE BRONFENBRENNER

The goal of this book was to provide a body of original scholarly research that captured global union efforts to take on and win against the world's largest transnational firms. More specifically, the book aimed to focus on comprehensive cross-border organizing and bargaining campaigns that took place, for the most part, outside the United States. Many might think it would have been a difficult goal to achieve, since the generally held presumption is that cross-border campaigns are primarily a U.S. invention. Yet, as the Global Unions Conference in February 2006 clearly demonstrated, union cross-border strategies can be found wherever there are workers, unions, and large, foreign-owned transnational companies, which today includes nearly every country in the world.

In fact, for most workers and unions in the Global North, the challenge of organizing and bargaining with transnational firms, particularly foreign-owned transnational firms, is really a phenomenon of the last few decades. As several of the chapters in this book point out, it is also one that has been differentially experienced by unions in some countries in western Europe, which have only just begun to wrestle with global restructuring of employment, joint efforts by governments following neoliberal strategies and major transnational firms to shift public policy toward employer interests, and aggressive efforts to eliminate unions where they already exist and keep unions out where they have yet to emerge.

For workers in the Global South, however, the concept of transnational capital goes back as far as European colonization in the 1600s. Like Sukthankar and Kolben in chapter 3 of this book, Geoffrey Jones in his book *Multinationals*

*and Globalization* describes the East India Tea Company as a protomulti-national enterprise functioning as a vertically integrated firm that undertook a full range of activities from the procurement of commodities in Asia to their wholesaling in Europe (2005, 17). As time progressed, the foil range of these activities included not only tea and spices but silk-spinning factories in India and led eventually to responsibility for governing in India, starting with revenue collection in Bengal.

While East India Tea may seem to be on entirely different scale than a company with the kind of scope, power, and global influence of Wal-Mart, it was, in many ways, the Wal-Mart of its day. Its primary goods—tea, silks, and spices—were produced in Asia but sold to a world market and therefore required a vast fleet of ships and a land-based warehouse, packaging, and distribution system. And, like Wal-Mart, its profits depended on keeping the wages as low as possible among its producers and it could only do so thanks to the full support of the state (the Crown), even to the point of using slave labor long after it had been banned in all other colonies of the British Empire (Jones 2005; Sukthankar and Kolben chapter 3).

East India Tea, of course, was just the beginning. Workers throughout the Global South, whether producing gold from South Africa, oil in the East Indies, tin in Malaya, coffee in Brazil, or bananas in Latin America, were employed by large foreign-owned transnational firms a century before most U.S. and European workers were (Jones 2005).

Certainly European and U.S.-owned companies sold to foreign markets. But it was not until the late 1970s and early 1980s that workers in United States and Europe began to more routinely confront the challenge of foreign ownership of their companies. In contrast, unions in the Global South have never operated in a world where they were not dealing with powerful foreign-owned transnational firms, closely supported by the military, trade, tax, employment, labor, and investment policies not just of their own governments but of the governments of parent companies as well. Jobs might move from one country in the Global South to another, and firms from one country in the Global North might buy out firms owned by another firm in the Global North, but without question, if any union in Asia, Latin America, or Africa wanted to challenge the owners of capital, it would have to exert pressure not just on local managers. In fact, employers were so closely tied to the state that in many countries the national and the foreign government would work hand in hand to send in police or soldiers to intimidate, threaten, or, in some cases, simply make labor leaders disappear. It is therefore not surprising that labor issues then and now have been at the core of so many independence movements.

We can also assume that key to all these struggles were the principals of grassroots coalition building and leveraging power.—After all, how could workers in the Philippines, South Africa, or Guatemala even hope to take on

transnational firms or neofascist dictatorships without leverage of some kind? Equally important, giVen the linkages between imperialist and colonial governments and transnational firms, even without unions, how could they effectively challenge either the state or the foreign-owned companies for whom they toiled without recognizing those linkages and effectively challenging both economic and political power?

As Tom Juravich explains in chapter 1, many unions in the Global North are just beginning to figure this out. Most spent the last two decades thinking that it was the other countries that were stealing their companies and their jobs, not the seemingly stateless entities that own these firms. And as they reached out for help from unions in the Global South to aid them in their battles while simultaneously blaming them for stealing their jobs, it never occurred to many of them that the unions in those countries had faced the world's most powerful corporate giants from the earliest days of their own unionization and might be able to teach them a thing or two about taking these companies on. Most scholars writing about the development of cross-border campaigns in the Global North treat them as a northern invention, ignoring the rich tradition of global solidarity in sectors such as mining or maritime, or the historic cross-border campaigns such as the decades-long organizing struggle against United Fruit still being played out today (Frundt chapter 5).

This has not been just a historical problem, however. Even today the literature on global union strategies has been overwhelmingly U.S.-centric or Eurocentric, and in its narrowness of focus a great deal has been lost. As the research and analysis captured in this book tell us, workers are building global unions to take on global companies through a diversity of strategies around the globe. There are several key lessons we can learn from these campaigns. In particular these lessons have to do with the role of the state, membership and leadership education and engagement, strategic research, and the nature of the campaigns themselves.

## **Role of the State**

First, the state plays a very different role across countries and industries. In several cases unions relied on legal campaigns that were doomed to failure absent linkages with a comprehensive leverage strategy focused on both capital and the state because the laws were virtually unenforceable or at best simply not enforced. This was clearly the case in the Euromedical campaign in Malaysia, where, as Peter Wad explains in chapter 2, over a period of thirty years the union fought and won its case in every labor industrial relations and judicial forum, all the way to the highest court in the nation, only to be ignored by the company at every turn. It was only through pressure on key decision

makers in the parent company outside Malaysia that Euromedical was forced to concede.

As Valeria Pulignano explains in chapter 7, for the European unions, moving toward comprehensive cross-border campaigns has meant breaking away from nationally based vertical structures that are rooted in the labor legislation of each country. Specifically, in many European countries this requires shifting from company-based works councils toward company-wide and European-wide structures. This is indeed a difficult challenge because it involves breaking down not only cultural and language barriers but also long-standing practices that have developed as an outgrowth of the different labor laws, policies, and societal norms in each country. It also requires withstanding conscious efforts by the employer to pit workers against one another by region, country, or production line in order to obtain greater concessions. A further unacknowledged dimension is that many corporations are no longer regionally concentrated firms but truly global transnational companies, spread across every continent. Such developments further limit the effectiveness of national or regionally focused legislation (such as that promulgated by the European Union) in regulating transnational labor and employment law violations.

Similarly, Peter Turnbull (chapter 6) describes how when the European Parliament issued its first ports package in February 2001, severely threatening the job security of dockers throughout Europe, some European transport unions thought that they could simply use the legislative lobbying process to make minor amendments to the directives to protect their jobs. However, the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) understood that without the development of what Turnbull calls a new unconventional repertoire of collective action, including coordinated strikes at international ports across Europe and mass demonstrations at the European Parliament, neither the state nor the shipping industry employers would change their position.

In many cases the laws on the books are merely for show, and the state has no capacity for or inclination toward enforcement. This was the case in Sri Lanka, where the union circumvented this sham process—by building networks of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and unions, locally, nationally, and internationally; engaging in escalating actions in the workplace and the community; and bringing in the European Union (EU), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Fair Labor Association (FLA) to investigate trade violations by employers in export processing zones (EPZs) (chapter 4).

In other cases unions and labor NGOs have also learned to use the state and state labor bodies for their own purposes. As Darryn Snell describes (chapter 10), several NGOs and unions took on those transnational firms with the worst human rights records in the Global South by filing court cases in U.S. courts for violations under the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA)/ the most high-profile case being the suit against Coca-Cola for its use of the paramilitary to crush

the union at its facilities in Colombia. Others, such as the union at Euromedical in Malaysia, have used an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) contact point as an additional relationship to pressure a parent company to get involved in settling a dispute (Wad chapter 2).

Thus the cases in this book show the state in two very different lights. The first is as the arm of the large transnational enterprise, either as one more institution over which capital has controlling interest or as a tool over which capital has the means to exert enormous influence. But these chapters also tell another story, of the state as a key stakeholder or decision maker, which the union is able to successfully leverage as part of a multifaceted comprehensive campaign for union recognition or collective bargaining.

This points to the ultimate weakness in so many of these campaigns. They are by nature piecemeal and mostly defensive. They are only rarely strategic, tackling entire industries, companies, and sectors with a long-term offensive plan. Certainly any long-term strategy would have to include breaking the hold that the world's largest transnational firms have over not only global trade and investment policy and national, state, and local government but also over supra-state institutions such as the EU or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Treating the state as just one more leverage point is not enough.

What is missing is a strategy that actually separates the state from capital itself. There certainly have been some notable moves in that direction, most significantly the leading role that independent unions have played in helping to oust neoliberal governments from power in Latin American (Lujan 2006). Yet still the majority of unions and union federations remain closely allied with their political parties and unwilling or afraid to take on global capital directly. The global union federations (GUFs) and the national union federations were not leading the demonstrations in the streets in Seattle, Quebec, Milan, or Miami. And while independent unions in Latin American have led the way in pushing out neoliberal governments in several key countries in that part of the world, each of those movements is still a work in progress, and unions in the rest of the world do not seem eager to follow suit. Until unions actually do more to break the linkage between the state and capital, some of the largest, most profitable companies in the world—Exxon Mobil, Coca-Cola, and Wal-Mart—will also continue to be some of the most serious violators of fundamental labor and human rights (Snell chapter 10; Brenner, Eidlin, and Candaele 2006).

### **Membership and Leadership Education and Engagement**

Another important lesson raised by the cases in this book is the critical role played by membership and leadership education in cross-border campaigns.

Pulignano's chapter (7) is a story just as much about the challenges of cross-border campaigns as about the potential for cross-border strategies in Europe. Many of the local unions responded to the employer's appeal to put their own interests first, rather than uniting with works councils in other GM subsidiaries and countries to save jobs across Europe. Extensive workplace education about the issues and worker-to-worker exchanges between plants and countries would have been essential to build the links and find the common ground to develop the kind of solidarity necessary to pull off a cross-Europe campaign. In fact, that slow building of worker-to-worker networks and membership education formed the foundation in both the docker and EPZ textile workers campaigns (TurnbuU chapter 6; Gunawardana chapter 4). Similar problems emerged in the First Student campaign, where the lack of a full exchange of ideas, goals, and interests, upon which long-term cross-border alliances depend, contributed to some of the tensions around respect and mutual interest between the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) staff on one hand and the rank-and-file leadership from the U.K. union on the other. Yet in the follow-up to the initial campaign, education and active engagement between the two organizations have also played a role in building on the earlier effort to make the process more mutual and effective for the future (Tattersall chapter 8).

As Stevis and Boswell's chapter (9) on international framework agreements (IFAs) makes clear, the leaders of national unions, national union federations, and GUFs also have a great deal of learning to do if cross-border campaigns are going to succeed. One of the most significant limitations of IFAs is that they tend to be concentrated in European-based firms in industries where western European-based unions and GUFs have the most influence, such as autos and transportation. Moreover, most GUFs have not made a priority of expanding IFAs to include the full range of the firm's operations outside Europe. Yet as Stevis and Boswell explain, for IFAs to be an effective tool they need to be linked with comprehensive campaigns in order to make them enforceable, and they need to be expanded to include the full range of the company's operations, outside Europe to North America and the Global South as well. The other danger of IFAs, codes of social responsibility (CSRs), and other global agreements is that national and supranational union bodies tend to look to them as substitutes for the building of a global labor movement. If the campaigns discussed in this book have taught us anything, it is that any authority—whether it be a judicial decree, an IFA, an OECD finding, or a recognition agreement—is only as good as the power of the multilevel grassroots networks of workers and their allies in labor organizations and NGOs to enforce those agreements, through local, national, and international actions in the workplace and the community. And as TurnbuU and Gunawardana most aptly showed, it is education that is most central to building those networks at each level.



Perhaps one of the most important lessons from these cases is that for cross-border campaigns to succeed, unions and NGOs from the north and south need to learn a great deal not only about the global economy but about each other. Service-sector unions have much to learn from industrial unions that have been taking on large transnational firms for a much longer time than they have, yet industrial unions have a lot to learn from service-sector unions about community coalitions and community-based campaigns. The greatest waste of all is for each organization, out of pride, arrogance, or simple lack of awareness of others' efforts, to single-handedly reinvent the wheel rather than share scarce resources, skills, and knowledge. The most effective way for them to learn about each other is through the worker and leader exchanges and networks that form the building blocks of the campaign at each level of the organization, locally, nationally, and globally.

## Research

As each of the campaigns in this book shows, it is also vital that workers, unions, and NGOs at all levels of their organizations gain a better understanding of both how the corporate ownership structure of the world's largest transnational firms is changing and how power and profits flow through these firms. As we can see from each of these cases, in many ways the companies these workers face act remarkably similarly at the ground level. There is a common thread of working longer and harder for less, multitasking, work restructuring, de-skilling, downsizing, playing workers against each other, cutting wages and benefits, de-unionizing where unions exist, fiercely opposing unions where they have yet to arrive, and ultimately shifting work around the world in search of lower production costs, greater flexibility, and fewer regulations.

Yet while the human resource officers for these firms may all be reading from the same instruction manual, and their decisions may wreak similar havoc on workers' lives, there remain enormous variations in how firms are structured and how power flows within each firm. If workers, unions, and their allies do not understand these differences, then they do not stand a chance of interfering with the key power relationships within the corporation. As we have seen from the cases in this book, there is a great deal of difference in how the union runs a campaign when the ultimate parent is a Danish shipping firm (APM-Maersk; see Wad chapter 2), a U.S.-owned banana producer (Fruendt chapter 5), or an apparel firm in a Sri Lankan EPZ (Gunawardana chapter 4).

But in the model we are talking about, it is not enough that the union conduct a critique of the company and identify the company's profit centers, growth strategies, and decision makers, and the key relationships among all of these. In a global, comprehensive campaign, this information then needs to

be shared with all stakeholders at every level, whether they are other unions, environmental groups, community action groups, union-company councils, national union federations, or GUFs. These stakeholders need to share, update, synthesize, and continue to monitor these firms as their structures and strategies change, sometimes in direct response to the union campaign.

Ideally, of course, this process should occur before campaigns start and continue after they end so that workers, unions, and their local, national, and international allies remain in a constant state of awareness of the firm's changing strategies and vulnerabilities. But even if the information sharing does not start until the campaign begins, what is key is that it never stop and that the structures to make that possible remain intact even after the crisis of the campaign is over. Each campaign also depends on being able to identify the key relationships among the profit centers, growth strategies, and key decision makers so the union can interfere with those relationships in developing a campaign.

Wal-Mart provides a perfect example of why this new, more strategic and more global framework for understanding corporate structure and the flow of corporate power is so critical. For the last decade there has been an ongoing effort to organize Wal-Mart in the United States and Canada. The company has made clear its determination to remain, in its words, union free—even distributing a manual with that title to all its managers (Wal-Mart Stores Inc. 1997) and shutting down (Demetrakakes 2003; Miller 2004; Zellner and Bernstein 2000; Struck 2005) or threatening to shut down (Heinzl and Strauss 1997) every retail unit that tries to organize. It has also shown blatant disregard for nearly every labor and employment law in existence, committing unfair labor practices during organizing campaigns; discriminating based on race, gender, and disability; and violating wage and hour, child labor, health and safety, and immigration laws (Miller 2004; Laska 2006; Russell 2004; Buckley and Daniel 2003; Drogin 2003). The union response has been to organize a consumer campaign against Wal-Mart, portraying it as a bad corporate citizen that forces down wages and living standards and cause's taxes to be raised wherever it moves. Yet the customers keep coming, and Wal-Mart just continues on the same path.

However, prior to the global conference we conducted an in-depth strategic research report on Wal-Mart. Our findings were clear. While the face of Wal-Mart might be its retail stores, our research found that its strategic vulnerability is its distribution network, through which everything supplied to Wal-Mart and sold out of Wal-Mart must travel. But the unions in North America who have been organizing Wal-Mart held firm, believing the campaign focused on the retail consumer was the only way to go.

Then on July 30, 2006, just before the World Cup quarter-final match between England and Portugal, when Wal-Mart's ASDA subsidiary in the United

Kingdom expected to serve twenty-four customers a second during the buildup to the game, thousands of workers at ASDA's distribution center threatened to go out on strike for union recognition. Wal-Mart immediately gave in, agreeing to a joint committee to oversee a recognition procedure (with neutrality) at twenty warehouses and giving the General Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union full access to the depots (Clement 2006). Since then workers have voted overwhelmingly for recognition at two previously unorganized ASDA distribution depots in Chepstow and Erith (*Morning Star* 2006).

Any campaign to organize Wal-Mart must connect workers in distribution to suppliers and then finally to workers in retail. Retail workers may be the last and most difficult to organize; thus if Wal-Mart is ever going to become a unionized firm, organizing may have to be centered on workers in supply and distribution, particularly in countries in Asia, where so many of the producers and the distribution hubs are concentrated. Yet, given that it is the world's largest employer and that nearly every single product—apparel, food, appliances, sporting goods, books, auto parts, electronics, household goods, pharmaceuticals, toys, and financial services—is now sold there, Wal-Mart has the power to drive down wage and working standards for every other product and service. Not organizing Wal-Mart is not a choice for the global labor movement.

However, perhaps more than that of any other transnational firm, the case of Wal-Mart illustrates the importance of ongoing strategic corporate research that will allow the global labor movement to find the leverage points to interfere with the company's key relationships around the world. Equally important, Wal-Mart is an example of a company where long before a campaign is mounted, it will be essential to establish structures to link workers in retail, distribution, and supply—from NGOs concerned with environmental, anti-sweatshop, child labor, civil, and labor rights to customer and concerned citizen groups at the local, national, and international levels. It will also be crucial to share information across these groups about the structure of the company, its power, its key relationships, and its vulnerabilities to help prepare for the kind of global campaign it will take to organize Wal-Mart in the future.

### **Strengthening Global Unions through Cross-Border Campaigns**

Finally, there are several key lessons that the global labor movement can learn from the cases in this book about strengthening global unions through cross-border campaigns. The core purpose of the global conference and of this book was not simply to strengthen union capacity to take on the world's largest transnational corporations but also to shift the balance of power between capital and labor so that unions could be a more effective voice in fighting for social and economic justice for all workers.

This is a much more complex proposition than it may seem because the global labor movement is truly divided within and across countries, sectors, industries, regions, and hemispheres. Yet, as these cases show, victory against the world's most powerful transnational firms depends not only on global solidarity among unions but also on solidarity between unions and NGOs at multiple levels. This means that relationship building at every level of the labor movement is paramount to the future of global unions. What is required is not just coalition building for the sake of one campaign but the kind of slow, one-on-one network building that Gunawardana writes about in her chapter on the women workers in the EPZs in Sri Lanka (see chapter 3). These relationships also cannot be parachuted into place from on high. Neither a GUF nor a national union federation can establish a relationship between unions and workers in two different countries. Instead, those relationships are best built through exchanges and joint actions between the unions and workers themselves. The same is true of relationships between unions and NGOs and other stakeholders. But most important of all, as Tattersall so aptly points out in the model of community unionism she presents in chapter 8, at every level the relationships that unions develop with other unions and with their allies cannot be unidirectional. They must involve mutual interests and shared values and be a priority for the long haul.

Nowhere does this become more important than in the relationship between unions in different regions of the world and sectors of the economy. The IFAs that fail to incorporate their subsidiaries in the Global South under the same terms as those in the Global North should be considered out of compliance, and no such IFAs should be considered in effect. More to the point, GUFs and their affiliates should mount aggressive global campaigns against those companies until they are willing to stop the double standard and bring subsidiaries of the company, whether in the Global South, eastern Europe, or North America, into compliance with the agreement.

The weakness of IFAs is just one problem that GUFs need to address. They need to work on becoming truly global federations, focusing on building global union power and assisting with industry- and company-wide comprehensive cross-border organizing and bargaining campaigns. They must work to strengthen union power in every sector in every part of the world, not just those sectors where a history of codetermination and high union density has made IFAs more attainable. GUFs should open rather than close the door to debate about different union strategies for challenging global capital and should help provide open forums to encourage and facilitate that debate. Most important of all, the GUFs and national trade unions in each country need to see cross-border campaigns as more than a two-way street, recognizing that in fact the strength of the global labor movement depends on the efforts of unions in the Global North to assist in developing strong and independent

trade unions in the Global South that can take on global capital at the production and distribution level. This includes providing financial resources, global solidarity actions, assistance with NGOs, and pressure on the parent company at headquarters and branches in the countries in the Global North where the GUFs are based. At the same time, unions in the Global South are uniquely situated to use their position in the global supply chain to support unions that are engaged in contract and organizing struggles in Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and North America. As we have learned only too well in the last five years, a weakened U.S. labor movement can have devastating economic, political, and environmental consequences for workers and unions in every country because it simply emboldens supranational bodies such as the World Bank, the WTO, and International Monetary Fund (IMF), over which U.S.-based transnational have so much control.

Another key lesson that comes out of the campaigns highlighted in this book is that they can take on a life of their own. With so many different allies and constituency groups involved, it is important to remember the original focus of the comprehensive campaign. It is not about leverage for leverage's sake. It is not about finding dirt on the boss or destroying the company. For the workers involved in these campaigns, no matter what terrible deeds this employer may have done, at the end of the day it is still their employer, the one that pays their bills, keeps food on the table, and keeps the community alive. They do not want that company destroyed or run out of town. Nor do they want it to destroy their community, its land, air, or water supply, their health, or their ability to have children.

Thus unions and their allies must strike a balance when launching these campaigns. From the beginning, they must make the members or rank-and-file workers being organized not just the public face of the campaign (although that is important) but also full participants in each stage of the process, from strategic research to developing the critique of the company to designing and implementing the campaign. As part of this process they must learn how and when to work with their members to determine victory and de-escalate the campaign. But in doing so they have to remember that their allies in group actions may not have obtained their goals in the fight. Thus, if part of the campaign was an investigation into health and safety or environmental violations industry-wide, then the union cannot settle those as part of their recognition or contract settlement. Otherwise they will never be able to build a coalition again. This is all the more important when these coalitions are across borders and the company starts asking the union in the Global North to end its support for the organizing drive in the Global South as part of the settlement. These, then, are the ultimate tests of global unions. If a campaign cannot withstand these pressures to break ranks, then transnational capital has already won because global solidarity has been thwarted. But if the unions can hold

together even in settlement, then they have proven that they have built a lasting coalition that will move on to the next struggle.

It is also important to remember that these kinds of union victories are at this point relatively few and far between. If global capital were to feel any real threat that unions were beginning to take back power on a significant scale, they would adjust their strategies accordingly, and unions around the world would face a much more formidable foe. Therefore, global unions cannot become attached to any individual strategy or model but must remain one step ahead of the employer by constantly adapting and readapting union strategies and tactics.

What the cases in this book show is that the world's unions have a greater potential than most realize to take on the most powerful corporations and win. These cases also show how difficult that can be. It requires enormous effort, creativity, and a willingness to take risks and reach across differences. • But going from individual cases to something bigger requires something else as well. As difficult as times are for workers in the Global North, and as much as the wealth accumulated by global capital comes mostly from taking enormous profits at the expense of all workers, part of the reason that capital is able to do what it does is that hundreds of years of colonialism and imperialism have restrained workers' power, wages, and labor costs. This not only has made many a CEO and corporate shareholder very rich but has helped make a middle-class lifestyle affordable for millions and millions of workers in the Global North that would not have been possible otherwise.

The first step in global wealth redistribution is stopping the race to the bottom by putting the resources from the unions in the Global North into doing everything possible to assist workers and unions in the Global South in building strong and independent unions to organize and bargain on their behalf with the transnational firms that are robbing them of their wealth. The second step is to join with unions from the Global South in mounting targeted global campaigns against the world's largest transnational firms. Finally, the third step is to emulate the unions of Latin America, which do not limit their efforts to the organizing and bargaining arena. They understand that for there to be real change, unions must also seek to change the political context and challenge the neoliberal paradigm by electing officials who are willing to work with the global labor movement to redefine a more just form of globalization—one that does not accept that the IMF, World Bank, and WTO should be setting trade and investment policy, and in turn wage and living standards, for workers around the world.

However, even the most effective global organizing, bargaining, and political campaigns cannot assume that unions can raise the living standards of those in the Global South without sacrificing some of what they have in the Global North. Years of colonialism, imperialism, and environmental

degradation come with a price. Labor's greatest chance of building a strong and vital global labor\* movement is sharing its power and wealth, because unions and workers in the Global North need the solidarity and power of unions and workers in the Global South just as much as those in the Global South need them. Workers and unions in every country need constant vigilance by labor academics to monitor and track the changing nature of the corporate leviathans with whom they struggle each day. At the same time, the labor academics need the institutional support of the unions if they are to continue to do the kind of high-quality strategic research that is so critical to understanding the changing nature of global corporate power.

The challenge faced by workers and unions as they confront transnational firms is one that may have begun hundreds of years ago, but it is now coming to the fore. Without question, a united global labor movement is the single greatest force for global social change and the single greatest hedge against the global race to the bottom when the unions reach across borders to realize that potential. Global unions are the future.