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Globalization and Labour in the Twenty-First Century

Verity Burgmann

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Globalization has adversely affected working-class organization and mobilization, increasing inequality by redistribution upwards from labour to capital. However, workers around the world are challenging their increased exploitation by globalizing corporations. In developed countries, many unions are transforming themselves to confront employer power in ways more appropriate to contemporary circumstances; in developing countries, militant new labour movements are emerging.

Drawing upon insights in anti-determinist Marxian perspectives, Verity Burgmann shows how working-class resistance is not futile, as protagonists of globalization often claim. She identifies eight characteristics of globalization harmful to workers and describes and analyses how they have responded collectively to these problems since 1990 and especially this century. With case studies from around the world, including Greece since 2008, she pays particular attention to new types of labour movement organization and mobilization that are not simply defensive reactions but are offensive and innovative responses that compel corporations or political institutions to change. Aging and less agile manifestations of the labour movement decline while new expressions of working-class organization and mobilization arise to better battle with corporate globalization.

This book will be of interest to students and scholars of labour studies, globalization, political economy, Marxism and sociology of work.

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Names: Burgmann, Verity, author.
Title: Globalization and labour in the twenty-first century /
Verity Burgmann.
Description: New York : Routledge, 2016. | Series: Routledge advances in international political economy | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2015043510| ISBN 9780415528535 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315624044 (ebook)
Subjects: LCSH: Labor movement–History–21st century. | Labor and globalization. | Capitalism–History–21st century.
Classification: LCC HD4855 .B87 2016 | DDC 331.88–dc23
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2015043510

ISBN: 978-0-415-52853-5 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-62404-4 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

Contents

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jan Aart Scholte and Robin Cohen of the Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation at the University of Warwick for their helpfulness at the start of this project in 2004. Others who assisted in some way include: Peter Alexander, Antonis Balasopoulos, Julia Ramírez Blanco, Linda Briskin, Marissa Brookes, Rowan Cahill, Drew Cottle, Ralph Darlington, Boris Frankel, Richard Freeman, Carla Lipsig-Mummé, David Lockwood, Andrew Milner, Richard Milner, Immanuel Ness, Silke Neunsinger, Bryan Palmer, Sean Scalmer, Andrew Schuller, Rakhi Sehgal, Beverly Silver, Amanda Tattersall, Marcel van der Linden, Raquel Varela, Charles Weathers, Eddie Webster, Steve Wright and Charlotte Yates. In 2010–2012 the Australian Research Council provided $90,000 for casual research assistants, which I would not have received without generous help with my funding application from Patricia Grimshaw and Chips Sowerwine. Jack Roberts was an excellent research assistant in English-language sources. Georgie Kamaris and Gonzalo Villaneuva were fantastic Greek- and Spanish-language research assistants. Unfortunately, the funding did not provide for any teaching relief and from 2009 my Head of School at the University of Melbourne made my working life a misery. I was therefore unable to complete the research and write the book until after I gave up paid academic employment in 2013. Thanks to Raelene Frances and James Walter, I became an honorary professor in Social Sciences at Monash University, which provided a very pleasant workplace and infrastructural support in this final stage. The team at Routledge – Sophie Iddamalgoda, Andrew Taylor, Laura Holiday, Emma Critchley and Sara Barnes were highly efficient and proficient.

For support through difficult times in the workplace, I am grateful to many colleagues, especially Philomena Murray, Hans Baer, Joy Damousi and Lynne Wrout. Most of all, I was sustained throughout this project by my family: husband Andrew Milner; sons David Milner, James Burgmann Milner and Robert Milner; daughters-in-law Clare McCutcheon and Jessica Turner; sisters Beverley Firth and Meredith Burgmann; and the memory of my parents, Lorna and Victor Burgmann.

I dedicate this book to Andrew Milner in gratitude for four decades of intellectual inspiration, love and companionship.

Abbreviations

ACFTU	All-China Federation of Trade Unions
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ADEDY	Civil Servants' Confederation
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
ASTI TMSS	ASTI Theka Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti
BA	British Airways
BCTF	British Columbia Teachers' Federation
BWI	Building and Woodworkers International
CAWU	Canadian Auto Workers' Union
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CJM	Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CTV	Workers' Confederation of Venezuela
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
CUPW	Canadian Union of Postal Workers
DISK	Confederate of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey
EI	Education International
EMU	European Monetary Union
EPZ	export processing zone
ESIEA	Union of Journalists, Photographers and other Media Industry Workers
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
EWC	European Works' Council
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
FOC	Flag of Convenience
FSU	Finance Sector Union
GDP	gross domestic product
GFA	Global Framework Agreement
GFC	global financial crisis
GFIW	General Federation of Iraqi Workers
GLS	Global Labor Strategies
GM	General Motors

GSEE	General Confederation of Greek Workers
GUF	Global Union Federation
IAEA	International Arts and Entertainment Alliance
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMT	Industrial Model Township
IP	Inicjatywna Pracownicza
IT	information techology
ITF	International Transport Workers' Federation
ITUC	International Trade Unions Confederation
ITWA	IT Workers Alliance
IUF	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JfJ	Justice for Janitors
JICT	Jakarta International Container Terminal
JIT	Just-In-Time production
KCTU	Korean Confederation of Trade Unions
KNS	Krantikari Naujawan Sabha
KPTU	Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions
KRWU	Korean Railway Workers Union
LAWAS	Latin American Workers Association
MMD	Movement for Multi-party Democracy
MUA	Maritime Union of Australia
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	non-government organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHC	Ontario Health Coalition
OLME	Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Greece
P3	Public Private Partnership
POSDEP	Hellenic Federation of University Teachers' Associations
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party
PSI	Public Services International
RSU	Rappresentenza Sindicale Unitaria
SAP	structural adjustment program
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SIGTUR	Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights
SL	Second Life
SOECN	Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén
SUD	Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratique
TCFUA	Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia

TGWU	Transport and General Workers Union
TINA	There Is No Alternative
UAW	United Automobile Workers
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers
UNI	Union Network International
UNT	National Union of Workers
USAS	United Students Against Sweatshops
USI	Union Solidarity International
USLAW	US Labor Against the War
Ver.Di	Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft
WRC	Worker Rights Consortium
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions

Introduction

The workers of the globalizing world

Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that complete equality was not possible but that society should aim to make people more rather than less equal. 'Precisely because the force of circumstance tends always to destroy equality, the force of legislation ought always to tend to preserve it.'[1] When inequalities are allowed by governments to reach the proportions attained over the past four decades, capitalism is more destructive than creative and societies become increasingly dysfunctional.

Thomas Piketty's monumental *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* suggests this is now occurring. Inequalities of wealth are close to surpassing their historical highs attained in Europe 1900–1910.[2] When the rate of return on capital persistently exceeds growth, as it did then and again now, 'capitalism automatically generates arbitrary and unsustainable inequalities that radically undermine the meritocratic values on which democratic societies are based'.[3] There is no natural, spontaneous process to prevent destabilizing, inegalitarian forces from prevailing permanently, but he insists democracy can regain control over capitalism and ensure that the general interest takes precedence over private interests.[4]

This possibility is proven, according to Piketty, because the relatively egalitarian interlude 1914–1970 was achieved by high and highly progressive taxes on incomes and inheritances, profits and wealth, dividends and interest. However, from the late-1970s, the ideological climate changed under the influence of globalization and heightened competition between states for capital. The result is an endless race to the bottom, leading to cuts in corporate tax rates and exemption of interest, dividends and other financial revenues from taxes to which labour incomes are subject.[5] Instead of protecting the general interest, governments have permitted 'a global dynamic of accumulation and distribution of wealth characterized by explosive trajectories and uncontrolled inegalitarian spirals'. Progressive taxation could 'effectively impede such a dynamic'.[6] The history of distribution has always been deeply political:

> the resurgence of inequality after 1980 is due largely to the political shifts of the past several decades, especially in regard to taxation and finance. The history of inequality is shaped by the way economic, social, and political

> actors view what is just and what is not, as well as by the relative power of those actors and the collective choices that result. It is the joint product of all relevant actors combined.[7]

Piketty does not explicitly acknowledge the power of labour as a factor shaping the history of distribution. He repeatedly attributes the reduction of inequality 1914–1970 to the impact of the world wars and the public policies that followed them.[8] However, his three examples of French public policy moving in egalitarian directions point to the influence of the labour movement.

In June 1920 a right-wing government, which had before the war opposed income tax with a 2 per cent top rate, introduced a tax with a 50 per cent top rate in 1920. Waves of strikes in May–June 1919 had threatened the country with paralysis, new sources of income were needed and the Bolshevik Revolution was fresh in everyone's minds. 'It was in this chaotic and explosive situation that the modern progressive income tax is born.'[9] After 1935 when the Popular Front came to power, workers' wages increased sharply due to the Matignon Accords, and the franc was devalued, resulting in inflation and a decrease in top decile share of incomes 1936–1938.[10] To end the May 1968 crisis caused by general strikes and student occupations, the de Gaulle Government signed the Grenelle Accords, which increased the minimum wage by 20 per cent; and governments from 1968–1983 felt obliged 'in a seething social and political climate' to boost the minimum wage significantly most years, which caused the average wage to more than double during this period. There was a sharp decrease in capital's share of national income and a very substantial compression of income inequality.[11]

Piketty's stark equation between war and egalitarian public policy is called into question also by the labour history of countries besides his native France. The role of labour is likewise obscured in his remark that 'as the developed countries grew wealthier, they decided to work less in order to allow for more free time', so the work day grew shorter.[12] It has been labour movement struggles, mostly fought extremely hard, that have brought about shorter working hours. Piketty's book is about capital; this book is about labour and class conflict.

If workers' power moves public policy in progressive directions, the opposite is likewise the case. If labour is weak, or successfully weakened by assaults on workers' bargaining power, public policy tends to move in regressive directions. Piketty acknowledges that the deliberate weakening of the power of labour has been a crucial component of the neoliberal revolution that commenced with the victories of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and Ronald Reagan in 1980, marking a political turn opposite in direction from that between 1914 and 1970.

> By 2010, and despite the crisis that began in 2007–2008, capital was prospering as it had not done since 1913 … it has changed the way we look at the capital-labor split since the beginning of the twenty-first century, as well as our view of changes likely to occur in the decades to come.[13]

Before returning to 'the capital-labour split', the picture of increasing inequalities since 1970 deserves filling in, bearing in mind that even the best available data underestimate the increase in inequality, as tax returns at the higher levels are becoming less accurate.[14]

The inegalitarian effects of globalization

If current trends continue the richest centile will own more than half of the world's wealth by 2016; its share increased from 44 per cent in 2009 to 48 per cent in 2014.[15] The top decile owns 80–90 per cent of total global wealth and the bottom half in world wealth distribution owns less than 5 per cent.[16] However, with the world entering a phase in which rich and poor countries are converging in income, inequality is now a far greater issue domestically than internationally. Piketty maintains: 'Inequality in the ownership of capital brings the rich and poor within each country into conflict with one another far more than it pits one country against another.'[17] Moreover, contrary to widespread belief, intergenerational warfare has not replaced class warfare. High concentration of wealth is explained mainly by the importance of inherited wealth and its cumulative effects.[18] In the United States of America (USA) in 2010–2011, where the top decile owned 72 per cent of total wealth and the bottom half only 2 per cent, the same concentration of wealth was found in each age cohort.[19] Class far outweighs age as well as nationality. The crucial statistics therefore are those about inequalities of wealth and income within countries.

Wealth inequality has increased significantly in most economies around the world, whether developed or developing.[20] The proportion of wealth owned by India's billionaires increased from 1.8 per cent in 2003 to 26 per cent in 2008.[21] In Scandinavian countries in 1970, an historical/geographical low point, the richest decile owned only 50 per cent of national wealth; currently, the richest decile in most European countries, including France, Germany, Britain and Italy, owns around 60 per cent, the poorest half generally less than 5 per cent.[22] To illustrate the increase in inequality since 1970, Piketty shows that private capital was worth 2–3.5 years of national income in the eight richest countries by gross domestic product (GDP) in 1970 (USA, Japan, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada, Australia) but 4–7 years of national income in those countries in 2010.[23]

In the USA, 64 per cent of all financial gains during the 1990s went to the wealthiest 1 per cent; this top centile captured 95 per cent of all growth in 2009–2012 while the bottom 90 per cent became poorer.[24] In 2011, as the Occupy movement loudly pointed out, the wealthiest 1 per cent owned more than 40 per cent of wealth.[25] The discrepancy between average and median wealth has blown out hugely, a clear indicator of increasing inequality. In 2014 a Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report showed average US household wealth was US$301,000 whereas the median was only US$45,000.[26]

Income inequalities are always less than wealth inequalities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), for countries in which data are available, on average the richest 10 per cent receive 30–40 per cent of total income,

the poorest 10 per cent around 2 per cent of total income.[27] Income inequalities within most countries, like wealth inequalities, have risen considerably. In 24 of 26 countries surveyed, the richest centile increased its share of income between 1980 and 2013, although inequality has been reduced in South American countries in the past decade through more progressive taxation, public services, social protection and decent work. For example, in Brazil the Gini coefficient declined by about 10 per cent between 2001 and 2011.[28] In most Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in 2014, the gap between rich and poor was at its highest level in 30 years. In the 1980s the income ratio of the highest-paid to the lowest-paid decile was 7 : 1; by 2014 it had risen to 9.5 : 1.[29]

In the United Kingdom (UK), the percentage of national income taken home by the top centile increased from 7.1 per cent in 1970 to 14.3 per cent by 2005.[30] In continental European countries and Japan, the top centile's share has risen by two to three points of national income in the past 30 years, but in the USA it has risen 10 to 15 points, five to seven times greater.[31] In the 1970s the top centile's portion of national income in the USA, Canada and Australia ranged between 9 per cent in Canada and 5 per cent in Australia, with the USA somewhere in between. In the early 2010s, the situation was quite different, with the top centile receiving nearly 20 per cent in the USA, 14–15 per cent in Canada and 9–10 per cent in Australia.[32] Income inequality in the USA had reached its lowest ebb in 1950–1980 but 'exploded' after 1980,[33] top centile income doubling from 10 to 20 per cent between 1980 and 2013.[34]

The USA is also the trendsetter in top decile income fortunes. Its share in US national income was 45–50 per cent in the 1910s–1920s, less than 35 per cent in the 1950s, 30–35 per cent in the 1970s, then 45–50 per cent in 2000–2010.[35] Its share slightly exceeded 50 per cent on the eve of the 2008 crisis and then again in the early 2010s and the increase is still continuing.[36] From 1977 to 2007 the top decile appropriated three-quarters of the growth. For the bottom 90 per cent the rate of income growth was less than 0.5 per cent per year. Piketty finds it 'hard to imagine an economy and society that can continue functioning indefinitely with such extreme divergence between social groups'.[37] In France and Germany today the top decile share is 25–30 per cent; in Scandinavia in 1970–1990 it was 20 per cent.[38]

In poor and emerging economies – extrapolating from data for South Africa, India, Indonesia and Argentina – the top centile's share of national income has risen less than in the USA but more than in Europe. In 1910–1950 the top centile received around 20 per cent, fell to 6–12 per cent between 1950 and 1980, then rebounded in the 1980s and today stands at about 15 per cent.[39] Chinese income inequality rose rapidly following liberalization in the 1980s, but the top centile's share in 2000–2010 was still relatively low at 10–11 per cent.[40] However, by 2013, the top decile in China took home nearly 60 per cent of income.[41] This has led to rising social tensions; the increasing number of 'mass incidents', as they are called, are contained by repressive measures.[42]

The OECD published a landmark report in December 2014, showing that economies the world over are hamstrung by growing inequality, because income

inequality has a negative and statistically significant impact on growth.[43] UK households bought 6.1 per cent less food in 2013 than in 2007; those on the lowest incomes were hardest hit.[44] In the UK, with inequality rising and more people being driven into poverty, being born outside the 1 per cent adversely affects life expectancy and health, educational and work prospects. Danny Dorling calls for a non-violent war of attrition against concentrated wealth, including shaming of the rich, to control these greedy people for their own good as well as the entire society.[45]

In the USA and much of the world there is now palpable depression, according to Robert Chesney, about the prospect of overcoming the downward spiral created by 'the tyranny of wealth and privilege'.[46] This tyranny of wealth and privilege is both cause and effect of globalization or, more accurately, neoliberal globalization. There is nothing inherently damaging about greater connectedness between the peoples of the planet that the word 'globalization' might entail. The problem is that it is globalization of a neoliberal kind that has occurred and is still evolving – under the guidance of the tyranny of wealth and privilege. Markets are not autonomous, spontaneous phenomena operating according to their own natural laws. In reality, as Piketty has shown, and Oxfam emphasizes, 'markets are social constructions whose rules are set by institutions and regulated by governments that should be accountable to the participants and citizens'.[47] Institutions and governments have regulated markets according to neoliberal rules, often inappropriately described as 'deregulation'.

For David Harvey, neoliberalism is a political project to guarantee ruling-class power and optimal conditions for capital accumulation.[48] Damien Cahill describes how neoliberalism has become a socially and institutionally embedded policy regime defined by microeconomic policies of privatization, marketization and 'deregulation' as well as macroeconomic policies of inflation-targeting. Contrary to normative prescriptions of neoliberal polemicists about winding back the state, actually existing neoliberalism involves expansion of both the economic size and the regulatory scope of capitalist states. From the 1970s onwards states rolled out abundant new rules, which privilege neoliberal forms of regulation.[49]

At the global level, transnational agencies, notably the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) enforce neoliberal principles. Their rise to prominence is an important aspect of globalization. The main player behind globalization is the WTO, established in the mid-1990s, whose functions include administering global trade rules, providing a forum for negotiations on trade liberalization, monitoring national trade policies and handling trade disputes behind closed doors. People cannot lodge a complaint against a corporation. The WTO is undemocratic and clearly biased towards corporations and powerful countries. Corporate rights take precedence over labour standards, human rights, social justice and the environment.[50] A trade expert at Christian Aid explains: 'A country is "liberalized" by the World Bank and IMF; then the WTO comes in as a kind of police officer.' Their policies dovetail, known as 'coherence' in these agencies' jargon; on the ground it

can look more like a 'concerted pincer movement'.[51] To extrapolate from Karl Marx's description of the state in capitalist society, these transnational organizations could be regarded as the executive committee of the international bourgeoisie for managing the common affairs of the whole international bourgeoisie. They have done well by their clients.

The tyranny of wealth and privilege kept promising that as they became even richer everyone would benefit from a 'trickle-down effect'. If taxation regimes were more progressive such a wild promise might sound less ludicrous. A trickle-down effect is not possible in a world where wealth primarily circulates among extremely rich people; and taxation regimes dictated by those owners of immense wealth have become ever more regressive with reductions in top income, corporate and capital gains tax rates, and tax loopholes for the wealthy. Millions of average working Americans pay higher tax rates than the rich.[52] In most countries, according to Piketty, taxes have or will soon become regressive at the top of the income hierarchy. Around the world, tax competition largely exempts capital income from progressive taxation and increases reliance on regressive consumption taxes that disproportionately tax the poor, as in the nineteenth century.[53]

The 'capital-labour split'

The question of what shares of output should go respectively to wages and profits has long been at the heart of distributional conflict. In emphasizing this, Piketty recalls Haymarket in 1886, Fourmies in 1891 and Marikana in 2012, and asks rhetorically whether such violent clashes between labour and capital will be an integral part of twenty-first century history. He suggests they will, because the 'capital-labour split' gives rise to conflicts to the extent that the proportion of national income going to workers decreases and that to profits and capital increases.[54]

It is workers, who produce the goods and services of the world, who create wealth. The capital employers bring to the production process is provided by profits of the past, created by workers' labour. Workers are those who receive wages or salaries from employers and do not have significant control over the circumstances of their employment. This definition excludes people in managerial roles but includes many 'white-collar' employees, as well as most 'blue-collar' workers. Michael Zweig in *The Working Class Majority* estimates that 62 per cent of American adults are working class, despite the USA's peculiar nomenclature that presents them as 'middle class'.[55] Around the world, workers and unemployed workers and their dependants – along with peasants, subsistence farmers and tribal peoples – form the bulk of those who lack wealth and power; and the trajectory of capitalist development is to draw more and more people into waged work.

Upwards redistribution from labour to capital is the dominant factor in the marked increase of inequality in the globalizing period since the 1970s. Piketty argues that the upward trend in capital's share of income is consistent with an increase in capital's bargaining power vis-à-vis labour over the past few decades,

which have seen increased mobility of capital and heightened competition between states to attract investment. Moreover, 'no self-corrective mechanism exists to prevent a steady increase of the capital/income ratio … together with a steady rise in capital's share of national income'.[56] In the twenty-first century, capital's share of global income could amount to 30–40 per cent, close to that of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and might rise even higher.[57]

The trend became obvious by the mid-1990s. 'Wages as a share of national wealth are declining worldwide', Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Schumann commented in 1996. 'Share prices and corporate profits rise in double-digit leaps, whereas wages and salaries sink.'[58] In the new century, several official reports by the OECD and IMF noted the phenomenon.[59] A 2006 IMF study of 18 industrialized countries between 1985 and 2000 found that the combination of trade liberalization, foreign direct investment and imports from developing countries all contributed to the falling percentage of labour's share in national income.[60] In the two decades to 2010, Chinese workers' share of national income fell, contributing to China's low rate of consumption.[61] Progress in reducing 'working poverty' has stalled, according to an ILO report in 2014, which noted the consistent decrease in the share of national income going to labour over the last 30 years in developed and developing countries.[62]

In the USA the redistribution from labour to capital is manifest. The phenomenon of the 'overworked American' was starkly documented in 1991, yet the situation worsened further: by 1997 full-time employees in the USA were working a full workday per week more than in 1969 but were worse off financially, because real average weekly earnings and hourly take-home pay fell during that time, despite per capita real gross output increasing 54 per cent.[63] The real minimum wage was at its height back in 1969 ($10.10 in 2013 dollars). Under Reagan and Bush Senior in the 1980s it remained stuck, rose under Clinton, froze under Bush, then increased under Obama after 2008. In 2013 it stood at $7.25. The minimum wage, according to Piketty, plays an essential role in the formation and evolution of income inequalities: labour market regulations depend on each society's perceptions and norms of social justice and are intimately related to each country's social, political and cultural history.[64]

While workers' real wages fell 3.1 per cent between 1989 and 1997, the average CEO's pay doubled.[65] Indeed, Piketty alleges that the cause of rising inequality in the USA is largely the 'skyrocketing pay packages of top managers of large firms in the nonfinancial as well as financial sectors'.[66] Clinton complained on the 1992 campaign trail that American CEOs were 'paying themselves 100 times more than their workers'; by 1997 – on his watch – that figure had increased to 209 times.[67] The American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) reports each year on the ratio of average pay of CEOs at the 500 largest publicly traded companies to that of the average worker. Although the ratio in 2014 of 373 ($13.5 million compared with $36,134) was less than the 525 in 2000, the same methodology calculated that in 1990 it was 85 and in 1980 only 42.[68] In 2012, UK top executive pay was 170 times that of the average worker; back in 1950 it was 30 times.[69]

There is considerable agreement in the critical literature about how and why globalization has adversely affected those who do the work of this world, who produce the means of existence for us all, and those who in larger numbers nowadays are unable to find work. Governments increasingly abandoned principles of progressive taxation and wage justice in efforts to attract and retain mobile international capital. Labour-market 'deregulation' and anti-union industrial relations legislation has directly favoured corporations against the interests of employees. Since the late 1970s, the world's workers have, in the main, experienced rising unemployment, declining or stagnant real wages, increased working hours, deteriorating working conditions, decreased occupational safety, and increasing casualization and insecurity of employment. Other policies associated with globalization – such as de-industrialization in many developed countries, privatization and decreased public-sector spending – weakened workers' power and rights in myriad ways as traditionally strong union enclaves in manufacturing dwindled and the private sector generally grew at the expense of the public.

These adverse effects of globalization on workforces have caused immense difficulties for labour movements. In countries where independent trade unions exist, they comprise the industrial wing of the labour movement, whether traditional established unions or less formal workplace-based organizations created by workers acting collectively to improve their circumstances. In countries with parliamentary labour/social-democratic parties, these are often regarded as the political wing of the labour movement. However, the rightward trajectory of labour/social-democratic parties under the influence of neoliberalism has strained relations between them and workplace-based organizations such as unions; or unions have at times pursued the same rightward path as these parties. In using the terminology of 'labour movement', this book is concerned primarily with the impact of globalization on the industrial wing of labour movements and how these workers' organizations 'at the point of production' have responded.

To weaken both unions and workers' belief in the value of unions was an important aspect of globalizing corporations' primary aim of achieving upwards redistribution from labour to capital. Globalization is knowingly pursued by those who gain from it. It is a strategy of capital to subdue labour internationally to increase profit levels. As Ben Selwyn argued in 2014: 'the globalisation project, directed by giant transnational firms and capitalist states, is designed to expand the global labour force, raise its rate of exploitation and, crucially, divide it politically to reduce possibilities of the emergence of … class consciousness and possible challenges to capitalist hegemony'.[70]

Commonplace terminology reveals the degree of dishonourable intention toward workers on the part of transnational corporations in their globalizing project. Their discourse disdains to conceal their views and aims. In the neoliberal mantra, 'competitiveness' is increased dividends for shareholders and multimillion-dollar packages and pay-outs for corporate executives even when they underperform; but for employees it is downsizing, lower real wages, reduced welfare and public services, with job security and decent wages deemed impediments to the operations of the free market. For example, in 1996 the

OECD recommended explicitly the continuing removal of 'market imperfections' in the supply of production factors, including labour – in order to improve business competitiveness.[71] Another popular term is 'world best practice', which should more aptly be 'world worst practice' as far as the vast majority of people are concerned – employees squeezed by cost-cutting or unemployed people dependent on welfare systems threatened by declining public expenditure. The word 'reform' once indicated a progressive and/or egalitarian policy, but is nowadays used to describe policies that are regressive and/or inegalitarian; and labour/social-democratic parties parrot this usage, thereby helping to market anti-working-class policies that should be called by another name.

While the vocabulary of globalization reveals its cunning plans for the productive classes of the planet, it justifies in advance its adverse impacts by *naturalizing* globalization. The standard account of globalization purveyed by its protagonists is that globalization is a remorseless process beyond the control of humans. For example, Thomas Friedman states that some writings on globalization are misleading: 'those that suggest globalization can be stopped. It can't. It's inevitable.'[72] Neoliberal ideologue Peter Costello insisted when Australian Treasurer that globalization 'describes what is happening', so 'ranting against globalisation is like ranting against the telephone'.[73] Newspapers persistently endorse this message that resistance is futile. For Peter Marcuse, the language of globalization gives globalization a life of its own, 'making it a force, fetishizing it as something that has an existence independent of the will of human beings, inevitable and irresistable'.[74] R.W. Cox notes how domestic economies have become subordinated to perceived exigencies of the global economy and nation-states mystify their new external accountability to a nebula personified as the global economy through the new vocabulary of globalization.[75]

Globalization, presented as an inevitable and inexorable process that cannot be denied, has allowed transnational capitalism to press its interests and present its demands as a necessary corollary of this 'natural' process. Despite its popular portrayal, globalization is not like the weather. It is far from natural and requires immense effort on the part of nation-states and transnational institutions to clear the way for corporations. To this extent, it is more accurate to talk not of 'the powerless state', but of 'the supine state'. Nation-states are complicit in the processes associated with globalization, although these same developments threaten their sovereignty.

The academic 'globalization debate' of the 1990s mostly sidestepped the crucial issue of intentionality versus inevitability to focus on the challenge or otherwise of globalization to nation-state sovereignty. However, notable participants in that debate took for granted the unstoppable nature of globalization. Susan Strange, for example, maintained in *The Retreat of the State* that 'the impersonal forces of world markets … are now more powerful than the states to whom ultimate political authority over society and economy is supposed to belong'. She depicted the globalization process as an ever-turning treadmill powered by capital from which there is no escape: 'Its dynamism is a continuing factor, not a once-for-all change.'[76] Even Linda Weiss, who 'brought the state

back in' by insisting that states may at times be facilitators (even perpetrators) rather than mere victims of globalization, presents increasingly powerful global market forces as impersonal factors that states have chosen to champion.[77] In sponsoring neoliberal globalization, governments have ignored the important advice from Rousseau with which this chapter commenced.

Corporations benefit from the widespread belief that globalization is like the weather, so must be endured. 'To resist it is to resist reality', as Josée Johnston and James Goodman remark. Any attempt to manipulate such powerful forces is pointless and dangerous. The only option – to accept and adapt to the new reality – is neatly summarized by the acronym 'TINA' (There Is No Alternative). 'The TINA scenario is of course ideological, and obscures the interests it serves.'[78]

It was not the labour movement but the anti-capitalist/anti-corporate/global justice movement, in its heyday around the turn of the millennium, which first challenged the TINA scenario. Shouting 'Another World Is Possible', 'Human Need Not Corporate Greed!' and 'Our World Is Not For Sale!', activists stormed the citadels of corporate power such as meetings of the WTO. By insisting upon the possibility of another world, this movement provided a discursive alternative to what Cecelia Lynch described as 'globalization's normative headlock'.[79] The labour movement's response to and participation within the anti-corporate movement was ambivalent. There was strong working-class involvement and important contributions from union activists and particular radical unions as organizations, representing workers in all manner of occupations, white-collar and blue-collar, public and private; but trade union officialdom at higher levels preferred union contingents keep a safe distance from the centres of action, indicative of tensions within unions between militant, class-conscious activists and more co-opted and conservative officials.[80]

Similar findings emerged from a study of 843 protests between January 2006 and July 2013 in 87 countries, covering 91.9 per cent of the world population.[81] Among the 37 protests that involved more than a million people, was one of 100 million in India in February 2013, one of the largest protests in history. Involving a general strike in defence of workers' rights, it was against inequality and economic injustice, low living standards and attacks on wages and labour conditions.[82] However, apart from the 127 union-led strikes included in the study, unions were participants rather than initiators or leaders of the other protests, the vast majority of which were focused on issues highly relevant to labour movements.[83] In general, the 'leading cause' of the rising protests was found to be 'grievances related to economic justice and against austerity policies that include demands to reform public services and pensions, create good jobs and better labor conditions, make tax collection and fiscal spending progressive, reduce or eliminate inequality, alleviate low-living standards, enact land reform, and ensure affordable food, energy and housing'.[84] The authors of the report argue the rising number of protests indicate increasing social unrest in every region and 'reflect widespread frustration with governments that do not deliver – in every sort of political system – and with the increasing power of markets and corporations, which promote and benefit financially from the downsizing of

public sectors'.[85] The protests manifest 'people's indignation at the gross inequalities between ordinary communities and rich individuals/corporations'.[86] The Global Labour Institute response to the findings was concern about the absence of a coherent strategical response to such protests on the part of the international trade union movement and of most national union centres.[87]

The labour movement, as scholars of it are well aware, is far from a unified entity but a site of contestation and struggle. Capitalist globalization, as it takes its toll on those whom the labour movement represents, has sharpened and intensified long-running internecine debates about ultimate goals and immediate methods. It has also introduced new sources of tension, because globalization constitutes a challenge to the workers of the world that is fundamentally more dangerous than previous incarnations of capitalism; and capital's ability to get inside the heads of labour leaders is greater in its globalizing phase than ever before. Canadian union activist Sam Gindin has observed how frequently unions now echo capital's agenda, which reduces the capacity of working-class organizations to defend their members.

> The acceleration of capital's internationalization (i.e., globalization) and the resulting increased pressures to meet the test of competitiveness do of course confront us with constraints that we must address. But if we are seduced into accepting those constraints as *goals* – no matter how progressive-sounding the spin is … we are, as an independent movement, finished.… Nothing is more naïve, more disorienting, or more debilitating to the construction of an independent labor movement than the acceptance of the competitive framework.[88]

The labour movement is still formulating its many and varied responses and, in the process of so doing, is changing itself. Precisely because the challenges of globalization are so immense for labour movements, different union forms and methods are materializing. As new expressions of working-class organization and mobilization emerge to better battle with capitalist globalization, aging and less agile manifestations of the labour movement decline and even disappear. However, it is early days in this process, a moment in time fraught with danger for the labour movement, but also presenting potentiality. To make sense of the faltering first steps in the making of the globalized working class, this book is informed by anti-determinist Marxist ideas, discussed in the next chapter.

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1 Working-class agency and labour movement action

Anti-determinist theories

Although pessimism in the face of globalization might seem justified, any study of working-class responses should allow for the possibility of meaningful resistance. The enormous power of globalized capitalism can be appropriately acknowledged without, at the same time, becoming so overawed by the productive forces of capitalism that it is impossible to contemplate effective opposition.[1] An economic determinist rendering of Marxism risks concurring with conceptions of globalization that diminish the agency of labour by overemphasis on the dynamic role of capital as it spreads itself around the globe. It echoes rather than contests the way in which globalization is presented by its neoliberal protagonists as an inexorable and inevitable process happening *to* the world because of the internal momentum of capital. Such interpretation is not well suited to analysing the working-class discontents of globalization and considering potential outcomes.

Within the Western Marxist tradition, the economic determinist understanding of Marxism, which Teodor Shanin refers to as 'the massive brainwashing of interpretation initiated by the second International', has long been contested.[2] From the 1920s onwards Antonio Gramsci and others have stressed agency and consciousness to underwrite a Marxist rejection of economic determinism for only allowing workers the role of fatalistic reaction to economic forces. They have done battle with those who shift emphasis away from the emancipatory potential of proletarian agency towards more pessimistic intellectual themes that accentuate the domination of capital.[3]

Currents within Western Marxism that critique economic determinism and its corollary, fatalism, are pertinent to the analysis of labour organizations internationally, many of which do not accept that their futures are determined absolutely by structures over which they have no sway. Those who have done battle on behalf of the anti-determinist Marxist tradition include Jean-Paul Sartre and E.P. Thompson, for example in their arguments with Louis Althusser, whose structuralist Marxism caricatured in extreme form the Marxism handed down from the Second International.[4] Most recently, Antonio Negri's autonomist Marxism has offered a distinctive inflection relevant for studying labour in the

globalizing period. The writings of Sartre, Thompson and Negri point out a productive theoretical avenue in which to explore working-class responses to globalization.

'Fused groups' and 'the making of the working class'

History to Sartre was not order but rational disorder: at the moment when it maintains order – structure – history is already on the way to undoing it. Thus, the class struggle creates structures in the heart of which it exerts itself and which, in consequence, condition it – but to the extent that class struggle is prior to structures, it also continually overcomes them: 'Man receives structures; and in a sense it can be said that they make him. But he receives them as he is engaged in history, engaged in such a way that he cannot fail to destroy them, to constitute anew that which in turn will condition him.'[5] In relation to structures, 'each generation takes another distance, and it is this distance which allows the change of structure'; what man makes is history itself, the real overcoming of these structures in totalizing praxis. Althusser, Sartre complained, wants to make the structure privileged in relation to history, his 'Cartesian attitude' precluding transcendence [dépassement] made by people. Sartre stresses Marx's comment that 'the secret of the worker is the death of the bourgeoisie'.[6]

Sartre's progressive–regressive method is also relevant to an understanding of movements which seek to improve workers' individual circumstances through collective action. Articulated in *The Search for a Method*, this method entails a search for 'mediation' between 'being' and 'consciousness', to understand how subjective processes are played out through individuals – how individuals are subjects. Progressive–regressive method begins with social structure and traces its input in the individual, then returns to the individual and traces his or her input on the social structure.[7] In Sartrian terms, social movements such as unions are an important form of mediation between a participant's 'being' – the result of social structure – and his or her 'consciousness', and participation in the social movement also enables an individual to make an input on the social structure.

In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre studies the overcoming of structures by people acting collectively. Analysts of social movements could usefully utilize Sartre's existentialist Marxism, for it offers a coherent sociology of the group. Sartre distinguishes between groups incapable of significant actions ('alienated series') and those capable of overcoming passivity to assert freedom ('fused groups').[8] An 'alienated series' is a collective where scarce matter forms the interior bond between people, where they have internalized the passivity of matter, where each acts in the same way, but in a way shaped by the material object of the scarce matter. By contrast, 'fused groups' are those structured by interior bonds which overcome passivity, where the group has the project of overcoming scarcity and asserting freedom, and where every member has the same project. Examples of an 'alienated series' include the bus queue; 'fused groups' include those that make revolutions, such as that which stormed the Bastille on 14 July 1789. Sartre thus provides a set of categories to render all

collective behaviour intelligible in terms of individual praxis (the dialectical interplay between thought and action):

> the basis of intelligibility, for the fused group, is that the structure of certain objectives (communised or communising through the praxis of the Others, of enemies, of competitors, etc.) is revealed through the praxis of the individual as demanding the common unity of a praxis which is everyone's.[9]

Similarly, the determinist project is to E.P. Thompson an exercise at enmity with reason and censorious of freedom, which stems from a kind of intellectual agoraphobia, an anxiety before the uncertain and the unknown, 'a yearning for security within the cabin of the Absolute'.[10] In his famous polemic against Althusser, Thompson emphasized that classes are the subjects of history and that the working class makes itself as much as it is made.[11] Marx and Engels, he reminds us, ceaselessly ridiculed the pretensions of bourgeois economy to disclose 'fixed and eternal' laws:

> when capital and its relations are seen as a structure, in a given moment of capital's forms, then this structure has a categorical stasis … can allow for no impingement … which could modify its relations, for this would threaten the integrity of the categories themselves.
>
> This is an extraordinary mode of thought to find in a materialist, for capital has become Idea, which unfolds itself in history.[12]

Marx distinguished between a working class as a 'class-in-itself', defined objectively by relationship to the means of production, and a working class as a 'class-for-itself', prepared to act to improve its circumstances because conscious of its interests. In Thompson's approach, working-class *formation* arises out of working-class *situation*, because humans react to working-class *experience* in intelligent ways. 'Experience arises spontaneously within social being, but it does not arise without thought; it arises because men and women (and not only philosophers) are rational, and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world.'[13]

In his study of English working-class formation during the industrial revolution, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Thompson famously announces: 'The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making.'[14] The people at the heart of the class struggle, 'the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the "obsolete" hand-loom weaver, the "utopian" artisan' are rescued from the enormous condescension of posterity precisely because they are presented as its true subjects. Class, he insists, is not simply a structure; class occurs in human relationships, defined by people 'as they live their own history'.[15]

Workers are not merely bearers of structures, as economic determinist Marxism might have it. For Thompson, working-class consciousness is forged through solidaristic struggle against exploitation; it is created by individuals,

unions and other labour movement organizations, and mass movements – and strengthened by culture and ritual. Class-consciousness is the way in which working-class experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms. 'Consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way.'[16] A working class thus formed can modify its situation, so consciousness can to some extent affect being. Class formations

> arise at the intersection of determination and self-activity: the working class 'made itself as much as it was made.' We cannot put 'class' here and 'class consciousness' there, as two separate entities, the one sequential upon the other, since both must be taken together – the experience of determination, and the 'handling' of this in conscious ways. Nor can we deduce class from a static 'section' (since it is a *becoming* over time) nor as a function of a mode of production, since class formations and class consciousness (while subject to determinate pressures) eventuate in an open-ended process of *relationship* – of struggle with other classes – over time.[17]

The issues posed by Sartre and Thompson are relevant to the study of labour movement opposition to globalization. Sartre's sociology of the group provides a template for distinguishing between 'alienated series' of workers connected by common workplace situations but incapable of improving their circumstances and 'fused groups' of workers that mobilize effectively to demand a better life for themselves. Thompson's methods by which he rescued those who made the English working class from the enormous condescension of posterity are instructive for charting the beginnings of the making of a global working class.

Class composition and the autonomy of labour

The writings of Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Mario Tronti, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Harry Cleaver, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Franco Berardi and others offer an especially salient perspective on working-class action against globalization. Autonomism reverses the relationship between capital and labour that emerges in economic determinist Marxism, explicitly refusing to emphasize the dominance of capital and its accumulative logic as the unilateral force shaping the world. Dyer-Witheford describes how autonomist theory places labour rather than capital at the beginning of the dialectic of class struggle. Labour does not react to the development of capital; rather, the dynamism of capital is forged in reaction to the power of labour.

> Far from being a passive object of capitalist designs, the worker is in fact the active subject of production, the wellspring of the skills, innovation, and cooperation on which capital depends.… Labor is for capital always a problematic 'other' that must constantly be controlled and subdued, and that, as persistently, circumvents or challenges this command.[18]

The problems for practical action of emphasis on the dominance and dynamism of capital prompted the development of autonomist Marxism.[19] Theory, Negri emphasized, must always move within continual analysis of workers' needs. He insists that, when Marx defines the characteristics of the proletarian subject, he brings out its revolutionary productivity, constantly held down and always capable of new explosions: 'the working class is seen as a power [*potenza*], as a continuous possibility of revolt, as a capacity for unceasing and repeated attacks on power … and the ongoing invention of forms of organization and struggle'.[20]

Harry Cleaver coined the term 'autonomism' to describe Marxists who emphasize the 'self-activity of the working class' and the autonomous power of workers: their ability to define their own interests and struggle for these, to go beyond mere reaction to exploitation and take the offensive in ways that shape the class struggle and define the future. In particular, he notes, this tradition within Marxism stresses the autonomy of the working class vis-à-vis capital.[21] Capital cannot exist without labour, but labour is a subject potentially independent of capital: it existed prior to capital and could do so once more. The working class can therefore do away with capitalism and create a different sort of society, but capitalists will always require a working class, because they are inescapably dependent on labour for the creation of surplus value – profit. The working class, according to Negri, is a 'dynamic subject, antagonistic force tending toward its own independent identity';[22] and 'working-class struggles have within them a continuity of independent power'.[23] Autonomists insist that Marx's analysis, far from emphasizing the command of capital, affirms the power of the creative human energy Marx called 'labour' – the 'form-giving flame' of society.[24] For Negri: 'Labour is the essence of capital. It always has been so. It is also the essence of man, inasmuch as man is productive capacity.'[25]

Where Sartre and Thompson tender a subject-object dialectic in opposition to a dialectic that begins purely with the accumulative logic of capital, autonomism locates labour as object and subject at the dawn of the dialectic. Autonomism offers an especially astute understanding of globalization, for it insists not only upon the autonomy of the working class in relation to capital but also the priority of the working class's composition and action in determining the form and direction of the development of capital. According to Tronti, working-class struggles 'set the pace to which the political mechanisms of capital's own reproduction must be tuned'. Berating determinists for working with 'a concept that puts capitalist development first, and workers second', he called for a reversal of this polarity, for 'the beginning is the class struggle of the working class'.[26] Negri argues that 'working-class struggle is a determining and all-embracing factor in the present phase of capitalist development' and refers to 'the determining subjective action of objective, massified and economic movements of the working class'.[27]

Globalization is best understood as an attempt on the part of capital to solve the problem of working-class autonomy. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri maintain that the history of capitalist forms is *reactive*: 'capitalism undergoes systemic transformation only when it is forced to and when its current regime is no longer tenable'. To grasp the process from the perspective of its active element, Hardt

and Negri argue: 'The power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and not only determines the crisis but also dictates the terms and nature of the transformation. *The proletariat actually invents the social and productive forces that capital will be forced to adopt in the future*.'[28] Autonomist theory, John Holloway notes, liberates working-class struggle from a purely reactive role by insisting that capital depends upon labour for its reproduction and therefore labour insubordination is the driving force of capital. 'In the beginning is the scream.'[29]

This contention that workers' struggles explain the trajectory of capitalist development is inspired by Marx's observation in *Capital* that the initial impetus for capital's intensifying use of industrial machinery came from proletarian movements demanding a shorter working day. It is not capital that innovates and produces new productive relations but workers whose tendency is towards the refusal of work.[30] Capital does not unfold according to a self-contained logic, but is driven by the need to forestall, coopt and defeat labour – the 'other' that is both indispensable and inimical to its existence.[31]

Thus Negri observes that 'bosses are only happy with production when the labour within it is totally under command'.[32] Because labour can exist without capital but capital is dependent upon labour for profit-making, capital must coerce labour. The dynamic of capitalism resides in this need to 'command' labour. And, in the final analysis, as Negri writes of capital, 'fear for the future remains', because capital can never expropriate that particularity of the working class which is its hatred of exploitation, 'its uncontainability at any given level of equilibrium'. This is because the working class is also 'a project for the destruction of the capitalist mode of production'.[33] It has autonomy.

Also pertinent for understanding labour's experience of globalization is autonomism's careful consideration of the internal history – or composition – of the working class.[34] Class composition is attained when the working class displays 'a determinate level of solidification of needs and desires, as a dynamic subject'.[35] Where Thompson's working class makes itself once and for all, in autonomist theory there is continual evolution from one manifestation of class composition to another through 'cycles of struggle': the process of composition, decomposition and recomposition of the working class. If workers resisting capital compose themselves as a collectivity, capital must strive to decompose this cohesion, by revolutionizing the means of production, by recurrent restructurings, involving organizational changes and technological innovations that divide, deskill or eliminate dangerous groups of workers.[36] Negri argues:

> every time that labour-power effects a revolutionary transformation in its composition and becomes working class, at that point capital enters relations of crisis, and has only one weapon with which to respond: *restructuration* … for capital, restructuring is a political, economic and technological *mechanism* … to reduce the intensity of the political composition of the class.[37]

Decomposition gives rise eventually to new forms of struggle or a recomposition of the class. Rather than being made once over, the working class is, as Negri

puts it, perpetually remaking itself again and again in a movement of constant transformation.[38]

Negri refers to 'the dynamism of the processes of recomposition'.[39] The dynamism of capital portrayed in the *Communist Manifesto* is not inherent; it 'only results from a continuous struggle, in which the thrust of the working class is accepted, and new weapons are forged in order to prevent the class acting outside capital, and to make it act within a framework whose outlines are continually being drawn anew'.[40] It is not the momentum of capital but the composition/recomposition of labour that periodically brings about change through crisis: 'It is the making of the struggle, the incessant internal modification in the relationship between classes, the continuity of the process of recomposition of the proletariat that determines the pace and forms of the crisis.'[41] The concept of cycles of struggle 'steers clear of forecasting the future', but recognizes 'the continually self-renewing political composition of the working class'.[42]

Capital responds to working-class composition and recomposition by seeking to decompose the working-class; capital does not determine economic development. The strikes and struggles of the 1960s brought about a crisis in capitalist control, for working-class pressure on capital was reducing its profit margins.[43] The highly composed working class also used its power to promote legislation, so wage gains went hand in hand with advances in public services and reduction of working hours.[44] In the 1970s the crisis deepened. The wage struggle became so marked 'a kind of economic-political dual power came into existence'.[45] Capitalists realized they had to 'establish positions of counterattack from which they might destroy proletarian and working-class hegemony'.[46] The rise of free-market ideology went hand in hand with increasingly authoritarian suppression of those who stood to lose from capital's reorientation away from Keynesianism towards neoliberalism. The result was a decisive shift to a new relation of power, demonstrably on the side of capital.[47]

This new relation of power is expressed in the globalization project of capital, motivated by the desire to decompose the militant working class: capital responded 'in overall, global and social terms – in terms of global domination and control'.[48] To describe the new dimensions of command embodied in globalization, Hardt and Negri coined the term 'Empire', 'a vampire regime', an 'apparatus of capture' that lives off the vitality of the multitude.[49] 'The primary factors of production and exchange – money, technology, people, and goods – move with increasing ease across national boundaries; hence the nation-state has less and less power to regulate these flows and impose its authority over the economy.'[50] Sovereignty has taken a new form, composed of a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule.[51]

Yet the real substance of *Empire* is less the overwhelming power of capital expressed through this new formation but the potential power of labour:

> The passage to Empire and its processes of globalization offer new possibilities to the forces of liberation.… The creative forces of the multitude that sustain Empire are also capable of autonomously constructing a counter-Empire, an

> alternative political organization of global flows and exchanges. The struggles to contest and subvert Empire, as well as those to construct a real alternative, will thus take place on the imperial terrain itself – indeed, such new struggles have already begun to emerge. Through these struggles and many more like them, the multitude will have to invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond Empire.[52]

The creative movement of the multitude 'acts as an absolutely positive force that pushes the dominating power toward an abstract and empty unification, to which it appears as the distinct alternative'.[53] Hardt and Negri foretell the appearance on the world scene of the organization of the multitude as political subject; and affirm the productive nature of militancy, because it can turn resistance into 'counterpower'.[54] *Empire* became a point of reference for many activists in the struggle over globalization, for, as Steve Wright observes, it assigns a privileged role within the process of radical social change not to capital, Empire, but to a militant proletarian subject.[55] Definitely discouraging resignation in relation to capitalist forces, autonomism speaks to those discontented by globalization.

The adverse effect of globalization on workforces offers evidence that capitalists have for the moment succeeded in subordinating the workers of the world. Economy and society have been restructured in ways detrimental to employee interests; and workplace organization has suffered accordingly. Decomposition has undoubtedly occurred; but, according to autonomist theory, composition/recomposition will eventuate. Autonomism has shortcomings that are beyond the scope of this book to outline. It offers nonetheless a cogent way to comprehend globalization, decode developments within the working-class and countenance the capacity of labour to contest its current circumstances. Capital has pursued corporate globalization to subdue and control the problematic other of labour, to decompose the working class; recent developments on the labour side of the class divide, where workers have adjusted strategies to respond to the challenges of globalization, can be understood as responses in which labour composes or recomposes itself in ways newly problematic to capital. In contrast to analyses spooked by the dynamism of capital, this paradigm that provides the notion of Empire enables conceptualization of Counter-Empire: imagining of alternatives to corporate globalization and a leading role for labour in that transformation.

The composition/recomposition of the working class is not a noisy and well-publicized process. It occurs gradually over decades and often in subterranean or concealed forms. Most struggles go unreported. For example, on the USA/Mexican border, David Bacon found a long history of working-class movements, encompassing a chronicle of exploitation but also a tradition of powerful resistance. With more than a million workers in 3,800 factories, their movements are shaking the economic pillars of the free-trade economy. Yet, just as most of the organizing campaigns among workers in the USA go untold, the history of the border's social movements is also concealed.

> Those movements that surge from below – workers trying to wrest survival from low-wage factory jobs, squatter communities holding onto their land even as their leaders are jailed and they are threatened with eviction – have a history as unrecorded as that of the strikes in which I was organizer. The voices of the people who understand the consequences of globalization most directly, and who can speak with the authority of their own experience, are unheard.[56]

That the mainstream media normally displays no interest in stories of stubborn working-class resistance is hardly surprising. Unless spectacular in form, they are deemed of little interest to readers in a world dominated by neoliberal assumptions that workers' struggles and unions are outmoded. The mainstream media might also be wary of encouraging workers' mobilizations through coverage: these media are, after all, corporate bodies themselves, often of global proportions. In the past quarter century, however, the internet has enabled activists involved in acts of resistance to tell their own tales, to which this book is indebted.

Optimism and pessimism of the intellect: scholarly perspectives

It would be understandable if scholars sympathetic to labour exaggerated the extent and vigour of working-class resistance. It is important to resist such temptations. On the whole, assessments offered in the academic literature are cautiously based on extensive research and carefully considered. There is ready acknowledgement that globalization constitutes a serious problem for working-class organization. At the same time, however, scholars have rightly pointed to instances of regroupment, militancy and adaptation. The tone of the literature varies over time and space, reflecting developments in the real world of labour globally.

In 1994, Walter Galenson's *Trade Unionism. Growth and Decline. An International Study* maintained that the decline in union membership in the USA, while steeper than in most other countries, was part of a phenomenon affecting almost all industrial nations and many less developed countries.[57] Richard Hyman observed in 1999 that for over a decade academic writers had reflected upon 'a crisis of trade unionism'.[58] Carola Frege and John Kelly referred in 2003 to 'an awareness of crisis among all union movements'.[59] In the same year, Beverly Silver commenced her important study of workers' movements and globalization since 1870 with the observation that there was an almost complete consensus in the social science literature of the 1980s and 1990s that labour movements were in a general and severe crisis – indicated by declining strike activity and other overt expressions of labour militancy, falling union densities, shrinking real wages and growing job insecurity.[60]

With labour movements undoubtedly in varying degrees of disarray during the 1980s and 1990s, especially in developed countries, labour studies literature

of the time was characterized by a distinctly gloomy appraisal of the fortunes of working-class organization. Considering the effects of globalization, pessimism seemed well founded. However, some studies from the late 1990s also began to tell a different story about the capacity of labour to resist. The scholarly change in mood is expressed in new vocabulary – metaphors such as labour as the phoenix and novel concepts such as 'social-movement unionism' or 'community unionism' (discussed in Chapter 8), or 'labour movement revitalization'. Khalil Hassan noted in 2000 how labour movements around the world were engaged in major debates and efforts to create alternative union forms – variously termed 'social unionism', 'class struggle unionism', 'transformative unionism', 'social justice unionism' – precisely because existing models of unionism had been called into question by globalizing capital's blatant unwillingness to come to any sort of accommodation with the labour movement.[61]

One of the most significant new developments was 'social-movement unionism', discussed further in Chapter 6. This name was coined in 1988 by Peter Waterman but popularized in Kim Moody's *Workers in a Lean World* in 1997.[62] Moody's study of 'social-movement unionism' in the 1990s in North and South America, South Africa, South Korea and the more industrialized parts of the Third World charted a growing union-based rebellion against the effects of globalization, occurring because 'the pressures of lean production, neo-liberal austerity, and international competition bore down on more and more sectors of the working classes of more and more nations'. Moody argued the roots of labour's reawakening lay in the trends allegedly responsible for its downfall: industrial restructuring, downsizing, lean production, racial and gender recomposition, and 'the mother of all explanations, globalization'. These prompted workers and their organizations to seek new ways to act and mobilize. This more class-conscious unionism grew out of the new material circumstances imposed by corporate globalization: it was the child of this process.[63]

During the 1990s social-movement unionism erupted in many developing countries and also in North America and Europe, where it often constituted a direct challenge to existing conservative union structures that propounded the need for labour to work in harmony with capital.[64] Sam Gindin showed how the Canadian Auto Workers' Union opposed competitive 'race to the bottom' deals typical of other unions in the face of globalization.[65] Robin Kelley's study of Justice for Janitors and coalitions of union and community against racism in the USA, Gay Seidman's survey of workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa and Andrew Vandenberg's examination of the 1995 'Toys R Us' dispute in Sweden, provided additional examples of organized labour reasserting itself in militant, class-conscious ways in social-movement unionism, in alliance with social movements and constituencies beyond the workplace, whose interests became aligned with labour against the neoliberal imperatives imposed by globalizing capitalism.[66]

The phenomenon of social-movement unionism rekindled academic interest in the capacity of the labour movement not only to effect social change but also change itself. For example, in 2001, Lowell Turner examined the efforts of

American unions to transform themselves from 'inward-looking business unions' to an 'outward-looking social movement'.[67] Continuing this project in 2007 in *Labor in the New Urban Battle Grounds*, Turner defines social-movement unionism or 'social unionism' as 'an activist mobilization-based unionism that, in contrast to established insider unionism, pushes for substantial social change'. It refers to 'union strategies that use social movement-type approaches, such as coalition building, grassroots mobilization, aggressive organizing, demonstrations and civil disobedience, and which typically operate outside established channels'.[68]

Another development in the lexicon of labour studies was the metaphor of labour as a phoenix arising from the ashes. The turn of the millennium seemed an appropriate moment to see signs of rebirth. It was emphasized around this time that sharpened degrees of class division globally had brought with them increased levels of class conflict.[69] It was stressed, too, that not all countries mirrored the declining union densities in countries such as the US, UK, Australia, Canada, France and Spain. They increased, for example, in Norway, Sweden, Mexico, Korea and Taiwan.[70] And in countries where decline had been experienced, it was pointed out that more recent trends indicated stability or even increasing density once more, as in the USA where, after 30 years of decline, union membership began to increase in the mid-1990s and strike rates picked up for the first time in years.[71] Ronaldo Munck and Peter Waterman's edited collection in 1999 provided examples of adaptation and alternative union models globally that sought to meet the serious challenges posed by the restructuring of production.[72] In a collection edited by Robin Cohen and Shirin Rai in 2000, Munck observed that, after disarray at the commencement of corporate capital's globalization project, labour responded creatively and showed definite signs of renewed activity across the globe. 'The first reaction of fear and insecurity in the face of the forces unleashed by globalization has given way to a new more settled and even confident mood.'[73]

Foremost amongst turn-of-the-millennium texts that heralded an emergent syndicalism was the 1998 volume, *Rising From the Ashes? Labor in the Age of "Global" Capitalism*. It optimistically presented a picture of worldwide resurgent industrial action, often bypassing or in outright opposition to, prevailing union forms.[74] Allusion to the phoenix of classical mythology was a constant metaphor in the literature of the late 1990s and early years of this century that started to dispute the doom-and-gloom attitude to unionism that had distinguished accounts during the previous decade or so. For example, in the UK in 1998, John Kelly criticized those who argued there was a shift in both the world and national economies and societies that necessarily dooms the labour movement. 'Contrary to postmodernist claims that the classical labour movement is in terminal decline, long wave theory suggests that it is more likely to be on the threshold of resurgence.'[75] If the phoenix had not actually risen, there were now clear expectations that its appearance was possible.

The upbeat mood manifested itself in the USA with large academic conferences on the new labour movement and new journals that sought to actively

engage academics with it, for example, *Working USA*.[76] In 2002, Hoyt Wheeler maintained in *The Future of the American Labor Movement*:

> The labor movement is capable of reinventing itself, as it has over many centuries. It only needs to adopt the strategies and forms that facilitate and channel the natural energy and power that flow from the needs of workers … the new must be born out of the old.[77]

There was enthusiastic discussion of transformations within the AFL-CIO from 1995 with the launching of the 'organizing model', which focused on attempts to recruit new members, and establish footholds in new industries and among previously unorganized workers. It involved creating new relationships with activist members and with organizations outside the formal labour movement, employing new education and development opportunities for union staff and members, and developing innovative recruiting and bargaining campaigns.[78] These American developments were paralleled to some extent by British Trade Union Confederation initiatives from 1993. There are now more sombre appraisals of the 'organizing model' – acknowledgement it has not been completely successful in stemming membership decline – but for a while it was greeted optimistically as a portent of labour movement resurgence.[79]

Such promising developments prompted academics to study what they termed 'labour movement revitalization' – occasionally 'renewal' or 'revival'.[80] In 2003 a special issue of the *European Journal of Industrial Relations* devoted to labour movement revitalization observed that changing economic conditions, such as intensified international capital mobility, trade competition and new work organization, were transforming unions, which 'everywhere respond to the pressures of global capitalism by recasting themselves and deepening their efforts as political actors, beyond more limited traditional roles as labour market intermediaries'.[81] Labour movement politics was now reaching beyond traditional links with labour-friendly parties and negotiations with governments. Even movements without a tradition of 'political unionism' were becoming 'proactive political subjects'. The forms taken were shaped differently in each country, but in all cases, 'the shift toward a fuller political subject orientation lies at the centre of contemporary strategic adaptation and revitalization'.[82] In contrast to earlier labour studies scholarship, which saw unions as integrated, stable parties to enduring bargaining arrangements, allowing little room for labour as a movement or workers as actors with choices that matter, 'revitalization research' examined the potential for unions to serve as proactive organizers and system builders, shaping the challenges they face, through mobilization.[83]

However, revitalization research described more than explained the phenomenon it studied. The literature was characterized by a sense of welcome surprise and hesitation about how best to analyse the new class conflicts. By contrast, Silver's *Forces of Labor* argued persuasively and demonstrated empirically that where capital goes in its worldwide quest for cheap and subordinated labour, it helped to create the opposite effect. Chapter 4 outlines and utilizes her analysis.

Because labour-capital conflict follows where capital goes, she suggested we were on the eve of a shift in perspective about the fortunes of the labour movement.[84]

Bill Dunn explicitly warned against 'pessimism that sees little prospect of workers acting on their own behalf', because 'the case for writing off labour remains unproven'.[85] A strategy for labour needed to consider its capabilities, whether the potential for action was present, without requiring this to have already been acted upon.[86] His 2004 study asserted that stronger versions of globalization and post-Fordism too often exaggerated the extent to which contemporary economic structures worsen workers' conditions and preclude opposition.[87] So 'avowedly pro-labour theorists may reinforce the neo-liberal claims of disempowerment they seek to oppose. Accepting globalisation and labour's spatial dispersal and post-Fordist descriptions of labour's increasing heterogeneity may naturalise divisions.'[88] Adopting an anti-determinist, historical materialist perspective, Dunn contests what he calls 'determinist interpretations of labour's situation' and attempts 'to challenge the exclusion of workers as effective social actors' to encourage 'more positive investigations of how workers may act as effective social agents'.[89]

Sharon Smith argued in her 2006 book, *Subterranean Fire* – an elaboration of the phoenix metaphor – that a recent rise in struggle marked a significant departure from previous years.[90] She noted that in 2005 work stoppages had inched upward by 14 per cent over the previous year and seized upon media reports of increased militancy, for example the *Wall Street Journal* article on 15 November 2005 entitled 'Strikes Multiply Amid Increase in Labor Fights':

> Employers are taking a much harder bargaining position, and that's naturally going to be met by an elevated level of worker militancy. Given what we see going on this year, you have to expect the level of strike activity would increase.

It quoted a union leader's comment that: 'Unions are fed up.… Unions are in a fighting mood.'[91] *Subterranean Fire* was expressive of the optimism prior to the destabilizing impact of the global financial crisis (GFC).

Since 2008 there are new challenges for labour movements in conditions of recession and imposed austerity in many countries. Another issue has been time itself. The proportion of workers with experience of stronger union cultures wanes while the proportion of workers reared under corporate globalization waxes. This is a new challenge for workplace collective organization; yet younger workers are nonetheless often leading the way, as the literature emphasizes. Scholarship prior to 2008 seemed to wait expectantly for actually existing labour movements to re-emerge stronger and better. Since the GFC there have been harsher assessments of old-style labour and more prescriptions offered about how substantially labour movements must change.

Exceptions to the new critical mood are studies focused on the growing institutions of labour transnationalism. Two collections that surveyed these developments

with cautious optimism were produced by Andreas Bieler and others in 2008 and 2011. The 2008 collection discusses prospects for genuine labour transnationalism, in particular of responses that address the situation of both relatively privileged segments of the working class and impoverished ones, and which link urban and rural workers' struggles. The editors conclude by stressing the importance in the future of increased labour solidarity internationally to overcome the North–South divide, greater emphasis on organization of the growing informal sector and the need for more cooperation with other social movements.[92] The 2011 collection likewise surveys both opportunities and obstacles to labour transnationalism through case studies. It warns of the dangers of attempting to transplant experiences from one national context to another, because ignoring national circumstances obstructs efforts towards labour transnationalism; but uneven economic development and diverse national contexts are not insurmountable problems, as successful examples of transnational solidarity reveal.[93] Likewise, Jamie McCallum's 2013 study of Global Unions optimistically presents labour as an active agent responding to globalization by new forms of international organization, strategies and sources of power. Though the transnational nature of capital has weakened unions, they may adapt and eventually even thrive as they develop transnational organizing capacity.[94]

Differently, and drastically critical of existing labour movement forms, Stanley Aronowitz produced his 2014 manifesto on how a new, radical workers' movement – without unions always at its centre – could reverse the decline of American unionism. *The Death and Life of American Labor* argues that the US labour movement as we have known it has come to an end, with membership fallen below 11 per cent and collective bargaining become a form of collective begging due to clauses often forcing workers to surrender their right to withhold labour. With unions disempowered by such restrictions – and the perils of climate change, precarious work and new technologies demanding and encouraging new approaches – Aronowitz points to new initiatives, strikes, organizations and allies that have risen to fill the void. Inspired by the Occupy movement's redrawing of connections between labour activism and affordable housing and public transport, and the walkouts by un-unionized workers at Walmart and fast-food outlets, he envisions the formation of a renewed model of union organizing and a broader, radical workers' movement, reinstating the unrestricted strike so as to become again a potent force.[95]

Like much recent labour studies literature, Aronowitz's book combines, in the words of David Roediger's endorsement, 'sober reflection and grounded hope for a new workers' movement'. Very much in the newly diagnostic mood, in 2015 Marcel van der Linden argued that 'old-style' labour is in decline and can no longer cope with the challenges of neoliberalism and globalization, which require new policies and practices they apparently cannot offer. However, the very real militancy of workers around the world has not yet been consolidated in strong new organizations. Union structures, he reminds us, almost never develop smoothly by means of piecemeal engineering but are the outcome of conflicts and risky experiments. Pressure from below through alternative action models will be important.[96]

This book hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge that points to vital signs of labour movement life, whether traditional or novel in method; and to offer an understanding of how and why new ways of confronting capital have emerged. It identifies eight interconnected features of globalization that seriously challenge labour movements. Each of the following eight chapters takes as its focus one of these characteristics of corporate globalization that have proven problematic for the workers of the world: the transition to post-Fordist production methods; declining union densities in most developed countries; the shift in production to lower-wage economies, resulting in deindustrialization and increased unemployment in higher-wage economies; enhanced capital mobility, which has pitted the workers of the world literally against each other; heightened fragmentation of the workforce along lines of race/ethnicity and gender to increase profit; increased precarity and unemployment; the assault on the public realm via privatization and reduced public services; and the imposition of austerity in response to financial crisis, recession or extreme indebtedness.

In class war, as in football, everything is complicated by the presence of the other team. Working-class composition and recomposition – anticipated in autonomist theory – is happening, though largely concealed from public view. These chapters also discuss how workers around the world have reacted to each of these problematic features of globalization. Responses include normal, traditional forms of labour movement resurgence, but workers have also developed new ways to confront employer power particularly appropriate to the circumstances imposed by globalization. These processes are forging new labour movements and transforming old labour movements; they are signs of working-class composition in developing economies and recomposition in developed economies. In responding in creative ways to the problems caused by globalization, composing or recomposing labour is acting as a 'dynamic subject', presenting itself in newly troublesome ways as a 'problematic other' for capital's globalization project.

Notes

1 For J.K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (as we knew it): a Feminist Critique of Political Economy*, Cambridge/Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, left perspectives that constitute capitalism as large, powerful, active, expansive, penetrating, systematic, self-reproducing, dynamic and invariably victorious result in continual deferral of anti-capitalist projects of social transformation and non-capitalist initiatives of economic innovation, since these presumably would have little chance of success. See also Bill Dunn, *Global Restructuring and the Power of Labour*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 193, 211.

2 Teodor Shanin, 'Late Marx: gods and craftsmen', in Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road. Marx and 'the Peripheries of Capitalism'*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983, pp. 18, 20, 24–5.

3 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, London: New Left Books, 1976; Russell Jacoby, 'The Politics of Subjectivity: Notes on Marxism, The Movement and Bourgeois Society', *Telos* 9, Fall 1971, 119.

4 Andrew Milner, 'Considerations on English Marxism', *Labour History* 41, November 1981, 8.

5 Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Replies to Structuralism: An Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre', *Telos* 9, Fall 1971, 112.
6 Sartre, 'Replies to Structuralism', 114–15, 112.
7 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Search for a Method*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963.
8 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, London: New Left Books, 1976.
9 Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, p. 386.
10 E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin Press, 1978, p. 303.
11 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, pp. 297–8.
12 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 253.
13 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 200.
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15 Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, pp. 13, 11.
16 Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class*, p. 10.
17 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 298.
18 Nick Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx: Cycles and Circuits of Struggle in High-Technology Capitalism*, Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999, p. 65.
19 Mario Tronti, 'Lenin in England [1964]', in Red Notes (ed.), *Working Class Autonomy and the Crisis*, London: Red Notes, 1979, p. 1; Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, p. 65.
20 Antonio Negri, 'Crisis of the Planner State: Communism and Revolutionary Organization' [1971], in Antonio Negri, *Books for Burning. Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, London/New York: Verso, 2005, pp. 46, 39–40.
21 Harry Cleaver, 'Introduction', Texas Archives of Autonomous Marxism, www.eco.utexas.edu/hompages/faculty/cleaver/txarchintro.html (accessed 22 June 2006). See also Steve Wright, *Storming Heaven. Class Composition and Struggle in Italian Autonomist Marxism*, London and Sterling VA: Pluto Press, 2002, pp. 1–4.
22 Antonio Negri, 'Archaeology and Project: The Mass Worker and the Social Worker' [1982], in Antonio Negri, *Revolution Retrieved. Writings on Marx, Keynes, Capitalist Crisis and New Social Subjects (1967–83)*, London: Red Notes, 1988, p. 209.
23 Antonio Negri, 'Marx on Cycle and Crisis' [1968], in Negri, *Revolution Retrieved*, p. 78.
24 Dyer-Witheford, *Cyber-Marx*, p. 65.
25 Negri, 'Archaeology and Project', p. 226.
26 Tronti, 'Lenin in England', p. 1.
27 Negri, 'Marx on Cycle and Crisis', p. 78.
28 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 268.
29 John Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power*, London: Pluto Press, 2002, pp. 1, 163–6.
30 Michael Goddard, 'Interminable Autonomy: Bifo's Symptomatologies of the Present', *Mute*, 15 December 2009, www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/interminable-autonomy-bifo%E2%80%99s-symptomatologies-present (accessed 5 October 2015).
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2 Confronting post-Fordist production

> The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society.… Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.
>
> (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 38)

Recent transformations in production and labour process

In developed economies since the 1970s there has been an identifiable change in the organization of production and labour process. Known as the transition to 'post-Fordism', its characteristic methods involve flexible globalized networks of production, disaggregated smaller workplaces, increasing automation and speedup, Just-In-Time (JIT) production, heightened employer antipathy towards unions, a decline in manufacturing and rise in service-sector industries, fewer blue-collar and more white-collar workers, and precarization of workforces. Post-Fordism is strongly implicated in the decline of union densities and influence in most developed countries, because its features have eroded established areas of union strength, undermined traditional forms of workplace organization and made it more difficult for unions to attract and retain members.[1]

It is argued that fundamental changes in the international economy at this time prompted firms to change from 'Fordist' mass production, characteristic of the middle decades of the twentieth century, to 'post-Fordist' or 'flexible specialization' forms of production. This transition is thus both part of globalization and one of its effects, as the forces of globalization made the old system of mass-producing identical, cheap goods uncompetitive. Corporations in the globalizing period found it more profitable to produce diverse product lines targeted at different groups of consumers, so, instead of investing in mass production of a single product, corporations built more flexible systems of labour and equipment, such as JIT production, that could respond to the whims of the market. However, as Negri emphasizes in his discussion of 'peripheral Fordism', the

mass-production factories of developing countries are similar organizationally to those identified as Fordist in the heyday of such production in advanced industrialized economies.[2]

In advanced economies, the restructuring designated as post-Fordism is an important aspect of labour subordination under globalization. Negri argues that capitalists responded to the militancy of the 'mass worker' (the typical Fordist-period proletarian) by decentralizing production to 'fragment' the unity of labour-power.[3] From the mid-1970s onwards, capital mobilized against labour by constantly exercising its capacity to repress, fragment and introduce hierarchical division. This involved experiments in job-design, segmentation of the labour market, policies of regrading, reforms of methodologies of command within production:

> A restless, practical, process of trial and error was now set in motion, aimed at destroying any possibility of proletarian unification.… All manpower and job-design interventions are to be understood as policies which … intervene in order to block further development of its subversive potential.[4]

This 'restructuring of the interstices of the economy' constituted an 'attack on the homogeneity of the working class' by beginning to break down the large factories and disperse the mass workers throughout the whole space and time of society, decomposing both the technical structure of their work discipline and the organizations that expressed their demands (unions and reformist parties).[5]

Explanations for the crisis of labour movements in developed economies typically agree that post-Fordist transformations in production and labour process are crucial. Some scholars suggest that the new 'flexible production' systems have had an even more dramatic adverse effect on labour movements than capital mobility. For example, Craig Jenkins and Kevin Leicht argue that 'networks of temporary and cursory relationships with subcontractors and temporary help agencies' have replaced once-stable working classes. The result is a structurally disaggregated and disorganized working class, prone more to a politics of resentment than traditional working-class unions and leftist politics.[6]

This working class is also more heavily supervised and scrutinized at work. For instance, in the increasingly lean environment of the supermarket supply chain, heavily dependent on timely delivery of foodstuffs, tighter and more pervasive systems of monitoring and surveillance are instigated to secure required levels of performance.[7] Call-centre workers at an office in Sydney became 'white-hot with anger' following a 'draconian productivity push' in 2009 when management ordered them to observe a three-minute time-limit when using the toilet and to keep diary entries of how long they spent in the bathroom. Workers said they felt 'bullied and harassed' and outlined shocking examples of management invading their privacy, with team leaders following staff into bathrooms to hurry them along. The extent of their outrage forced management to abandon the policy; the union congratulated the workers for challenging the demeaning practice.[8]

An Australian Services Union report later that year discovered extraordinary levels of stress amongst call-centre staff, explained thus by one respondent: 'We are treated like school children in a monitored 24/7 environment that makes it feel like we are not trusted or treated as adults.'[9] Similar treatment of call-centre workers in the UK prompted Department for Work and Pensions call-centre employees in 2011 to strike for several days against oppressive working conditions, such as harsh penalties and dismissal for failing to achieve targets or exceeding eight days sick leave a year or 19 minutes each day for toilet, refreshment and other breaks.[10] Employers often alienate workforces with such measures. Seething resentment contains the potential for industrial militancy.

Beverly Silver notes that early twentieth-century observers of the transformations associated with Fordism were confident these spelled the death of labour movements, by making the skills of craft workers obsolete, allowing employers to tame new sources of labour, resulting in a working class seen as hopelessly divided and isolated from each other by fragmenting and alienating technologies. It was only with the success of mass-production unionism mid-century that Fordism came to be seen as labour strengthening rather than labour weakening.[11] Analogous scepticism about labour movements as doomed by post-industrialism abounds. Manuel Castells, for instance, maintained the labour movement appeared 'historically superseded' because of structural features and historical processes: 'the labor movement does not seem fit to generate by itself and from itself a project identity able to reconstruct social control and to rebuild social institutions in the Information Age'.[12] The following sections examine how unions are seeking to overcome problems caused by post-Fordist transformations, homing in on two of its aspects: JIT production; and decentralized, smaller workplaces with high workforce turnover.

From Flint to Foshan: striking at the Achilles heel of lean production

The post-Fordist transformation is not devoid of potential advantages for industrial militancy. In the case of JIT production, some spectacular cases have pointed to important possibilities. As Silver stresses, there are not just benefits but also dangers for transnational corporations in some of the changes in the labour process. In certain situations, JIT production increases the vulnerability of capital to disruptions in the flow of production and thus enhances workers' bargaining power based on direct action at the point of production. This is true not only of industries using JIT methods but also for workers in the transport and communications industries whose reliability this method depends upon; the more globalized the networks of production, the wider the potential geographical ramifications of disruptions by workers.[13]

A detailed study of German employers in the 1990s found that, because they were heavily invested in competitive strategies that often rely on JIT production, they were more dependent than ever on stable relations with labour at the plant level and more vulnerable to overt industrial strife. Firms that were part of

sprawling, often transnational, production networks and producing on a JIT basis correctly feared that disruptions in production could result in the loss of whole markets. Likewise, companies that competed on the basis of high quality and reliability were loath to have industry-wide or national conflicts played out in their plants. Employer associations were unable to muster support of core firms to respond to strike threats with sustained industrial conflict, so the 1990s saw a marked weakening in German employer solidarity and therefore decline of their most powerful weapon, the lockout.[14]

Ironically, global competitive pressures were undermining employer cohesion. As these pressures increased the cost of industrial conflict, a growing number of key employers prioritized maintaining labour peace. Firms whose production strategies rendered them very vulnerable to work stoppages preferred to settle for more expensive contracts than face industrial conflicts at their plants. Moreover, the decline of the lockout reduced the external pressure on the union to moderate its collective bargaining demands. Indeed, every movement in that direction exposed the union leadership to challenge from internal opponents favouring a more hard-line approach and pushing for a more aggressive stance by the union. Contrary to common perceptions about post-Fordist transformations promoting union moderation, even timidity, this study found union militancy was encouraged by the ever-greater need of employers for production-as-usual.[15]

Over the border in France, *The Economist* noted in March 2008 that French workers were now favouring short, sharp walkouts lasting less than a day. While these failed to register in official figures, giving the impression that strike rates had fallen since the late 1990s, the number of French firms hit by industrial disputes went up by roughly half between 1998 and 2004. 'They inflict the maximum disruption with the minimum loss of workers' pay. In a world of just-in-time production, a just-in-time walkout, or a union meeting that strays beyond the break, can wreak havoc and put pressure on management.' Workers at Toray Plastics Europe, in south-east France, had just won a dispute that way.[16]

A 2011 study in Britain found employer dependence on smoothly functioning supply chains provided opportunities for unions in a period otherwise characterized by a shift away from collective bargaining coverage and falling union membership across developed economies. It showed how various British unions mounted successful campaigns by using supply chain and procurement strategies to gain strategic leverage on behalf of non-unionized workers in low-wage sectors. It concluded that, despite the various political, legal and market-based constraints on traditional forms of multi-employer bargaining, union strategies built around the supply chain and procurement negotiations represented an avenue for extending organizing and bargaining coverage, particularly in the context of the complexities of modern production and competitive product markets.[17]

Revealingly, management literature warns employers of the hazards of JIT production. Global corporations are misguidedly reliant upon extensive supply chains that are disastrously under-buffered, according to B.C. Lynn, *The End of the Line: the Rise and Coming Fall of the Global Corporation*.[18] An article in

the *Journal of American Academy of Business* warns that interruption of material delivery along the supply chain can quickly cause manufacturing shutdowns and/or finished goods shortages when insufficient buffer stock is maintained along the chain. The 1992 railroad strike was 'one of many examples of this inherent risk within JIT'. General Motors (GM) was forced to shut down certain factories involving 75,000 workers on the first day of the strike, and would have experienced a total shutdown had there not been a speedy resolution. The authors equate such industrial trouble to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on Gulf Coast refining production.[19]

Those on the side of capital continue to alert corporations to the dangers of JIT. Noting that a 10-day labour stoppage on US West Coast ports in 2002 cost an estimated billion dollars a day, a business-world blog cautioned corporate clients in December 2014 about looming trouble on these same waterfronts with the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). The 29 ports in question are responsible for moving 12.5 per cent of the US's gross domestic product, a 50 per cent increase from 2002. They also handle over 70 per cent of imports from Asia. A 10-day shutdown, it estimated, could cost more than $2 billion a day. 'The crisis will end soon, but not soon enough for some companies reliant on Asian imports. It is too late to plan alternative long term strategies and mitigation methods', the blog states. 'An event like this can take even the most prepared company by surprise. In fact, all of our global manufacturing clients were affected in one way or another.' It advised 'comprehensive supply chain risk management'. With the West coast port situation 'creating severe uncertainty in this fragile economic climate', it asked its business clients rhetorically: 'Is your organization ready for a work stoppage at a major port? How have you prepared for future events like this, be it a labor stoppage or a natural disaster that can wreak havoc on your supply chain?'[20]

The *Journal of American Academy of Business* article cited above concluded that JIT does not work unless workers are treated extremely well. Empirical research, it stressed, reveals that organizations will fail to implement JIT successfully unless they adopt a 'Theory Z' approach to labour management (worker-based collective decision-making, implicit trust between workers and between workers and management, informal worker control combined with explicit worker measurement and responsibility, long-term assured worker employment and a management concern for worker and worker family welfare). For example, high-end American shoe manufacturer Allen-Edmonds found its piecework system and JIT practices at odds with each other, so had to move to hourly pay to create the kind of quality and teamwork-based culture required in a JIT environment.[21]

Typically, corporations do not adopt such an industrial relations approach when implementing JIT. The automobile industry is a classic example of how capitalist restructuring can provide opportunities for innovative industrial action. Pioneered by Toyota in the 1950s and 1960s, JIT became standard in the automobile industry worldwide from the mid-1980s, though its original intent as a means to identify errors and malfunctions in the production system has largely

been lost, because corporations obsessed with cost reduction embrace it to minimize expenditure on carrying inventory.[22]

James Rinehart and others describe how Japanese manufacturers, especially Toyota, led the way from the early 1980s in establishing 'lean production' as the standard manufacturing mode in the international automobile industry. North American auto manufacturers, including the Big Three, emulated the manufacturing methods developed in Japan. Mass production was diagnosed as terminally ill in media and business circles. The emergent system, which carried few, if any, traces of Fordism, seemingly offered optimum efficiency with simultaneous precision and flexibility, the capacity to reduce costs, tight inventories, quick die changes and low per-unit assembly hours. It was also characterized by multiskilled workers. Components for each American plant arrive from all over the globe. Vendors operate on a JIT basis, from wherever they deliver – the network stretches from Barrie, Ontario, to the tip of Ohio. The plant uses automated processes for delivering parts to the assembly line.[23]

D.W. Livingstone and P.H. Sawchuk maintained in 2004 that auto workers potentially wielded more economic power over the production process than ever before. However, their interviews with autoworkers found that perceptions of their relative economic might were moderated by the harsh realities of downsizing and shifting of automotive jobs to low-wage countries. 'Thus autoworkers, despite their *relative* productive power, are understandably apprehensive about their future employment prospects.'[24] Despite this widespread employment insecurity in the North American auto industry, its workers have nonetheless been unable to resist creating industrial havoc by exploiting the vulnerability of their bosses' fixation with JIT.

Obsession with reducing inventory to cut costs, at the heart of lean production, creates a hair-trigger sensitivity to delays.[25] In March 1996, the 17-day strike of 3,000 United Automobile Workers (UAW) members at two GM parts plants in Dayton, Ohio 'idled' virtually all of GM's North American automobile production at a cost of $47 million/day. In management literature and business journalism, JIT practices were blamed for the immediacy of the shutdowns; the shift away from large inventories to JIT parts delivery had cut costs but made car companies susceptible to walkouts.[26] This vulnerability of JIT was again demonstrated in a series of strikes the following year. For example, in July 1997, 2,800 workers went on strike at a GM transmission factory in suburban Detroit that supplies parts to all of GM's North American assembly plants except Saturn. By the third day of the strike, GM was forced to 'idle' 19,300 workers in four assembly plants, so the strike was settled in three days with the union claiming victory. Silver cites this case as an example of how a union can cripple production by putting only a few thousand workers on strike.[27]

Most spectacularly, in traditionally militant Flint, Michigan, workers at a stamping plant walked out on 5 June 1998, joined on 11 June by workers at the nearby Delphi Flint East parts plant, the sole source of many small parts – spark plugs, fuel injectors, oil filters, instrument clusters – to virtually all of GM's 29 North American assembly plants. With the widespread application of JIT, the

localized strike rippled through the entire GM system, shutting down 27 assembly plants from Oshawa, Ontario to Silao, Mexico, also closing or curtailing operations at 117 GM-owned parts plants.[28]

According to a *Christian Science Monitor* cover story, 'two union locals in the trailer-park town of Flint, Mich., were able to shut down production at the biggest company in the world'. It quoted Danny Hoffman at the University of Michigan's Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations in Ann Arbor, who stressed that JIT really had strengthened labour's hand. Industrial strife could shut down numerous plants within minutes, because parts are only delivered to an assembly-line shortly before needed, so that 'gives organized labor some real strategy'.[29] Writing about this dispute, a *Los Angeles Times* staff writer argued that: 'The strikes demonstrate how modern production techniques are making manufacturing companies more vulnerable to strategic strikes.' GM, it noted, uses just-in-time inventory flow, which requires the delivery of most parts when they are needed on the assembly line. This reduces costly inventory buildup and simplifies the production process. 'But it also means that a key parts factory can quickly bring a massive manufacturing organization to a halt.'[30]

GM was hoisted on its own petard in its search for efficiency and cost-cutting, according to another commentator. Just-in-time delivery and 'lean production', borrowed from Japanese automobile manufacturers, 'have concentrated parts production in a few key plants, creating a situation where strikes in even one of these plants can cripple the entire company in a few days. The result has been an increase in the UAW's power'. This reporter interviewed the UAW Local president at a plant producing Cadillacs whose workers were laid off because of the strike several hundred miles away. There were no recriminations against the strikers: 'They are protecting their jobs and the job security of future workers. It is not just their battle.'[31] In addition to withdrawing its allegation in court that the strikes were illegal, GM was forced to agree not to close certain plants before 2000 and to invest $180 million in equipment, boosting workers' job security.[32]

Kim Moody was optimistic in his evaluation of the 1990s autoworkers' strikes. Considering the 22 strikes against GM between 1990 and 1998, he claimed many of them demonstrated the power of the union and the vulnerability of JIT systems; most resulted in additional hiring at a time when GM was trying to downsize; in a few cases, GM was forced to backtrack on plans to disinvest or remove major facilities. In Flint in 1998, the union inflicted enormous damage on the company, which lost almost $3 billion in profits and $12 billion in sales during a 54-day conflict. Strikes in just two plants, by UAW Locals 659 and 651, closed 27 of GM's 29 assembly plants and over 100 parts plants in the USA, Mexico and Canada. 'Clearly, one lesson of this year's Flint strikes is that workers' power in the heart of international lean production has been magnified and the union's ability to broaden the scope of bargaining enhanced.'[33] Moody described the discovery by workers that they could close down much or all of a giant like GM or Ford, just by striking one or two plants, as 'a jujitsu-like flip of just-in-time production'.[34]

Moody drew broader conclusions about the significance of such strategic strike action in an aggressively neoliberal environment. With polls in 1996

showing that the public supported the GM strikes in Flint by huge margins (74 per cent in the Flint area; 67 per cent nationally, in an ABC National internet poll; and 'overwhelmingly' in a Gallup poll), Moody maintained that capital's thrust over the past 20 years to restructure, reshape and transform how it produces goods and services in the forge of ruthless competition has made one-time workplace issues into social issues. 'Herein lies not only better strike strategy, but the possibility of mobilizing across labor and beyond – the hope of organizing the unorganized.'[35]

He inquired who led these innovative actions, probing the internal dynamics of the American labour movement. The auto industry's striking workers, who had long been afraid to buck the company-union love fest that was eroding jobs and conditions, found their sea legs again:

> Most of this new consciousness and sometimes desperate militancy comes from the activist layer of the unions. These are workers, workplace representatives, and local union officials who maintain the United States' unions from day to day. They work between the upper layer of career officials and staffers on the one hand and the majority of members on the other.… It is in this layer that the return of resistance has gathered the greatest force and, now and then, breaks through the passivity of the members and the backward-looking resistance of the top officials.[36]

Around the world, automobile workers have continued to strike at the Achilles heel of JIT. For example, in January 2008 in Belgium, a strike for a wage increase at the Syncreon plant, one of seven subcontractors producing for the Ford factory in Genk, was soon joined by the workforces of other subcontractors. The strikes had an immediate effect on the supply of parts to the Ford factory. In some cases, it took only a few hours of strike action before bosses gave in to the workers' demands. Wage increases of around 4 per cent were given, including bonuses in some cases. The victories emboldened the workers at the Ford factory to press their demands for wage increases and for temporary contracts to be converted to permanent contracts and for a slowing down of production. The workers won bonuses and a 3 per cent decline in work pressure, and 210 workers were converted from temporary to permanent contracts. A mood of industrial militancy swept Belgium, with employers, politicians and the media expressing alarm about the strike wave.[37]

In 2010 in China's automotive plants, the workers' hand was strengthened by striking at the JIT system, commencing at a parts plant, in what became the highest-profile strike action in Chinese history and the trigger for a summer strike-wave reported around the world. In the industrial city of Foshan in Guangdong province, the strike of 1,800 workers at Honda's Nanhai plant, which produces transmission systems for the main plants, started spontaneously on 17 May when two workers in the automatic transmission department pressed the red stop button normally used only for emergency shutdowns in case of quality problems. After a week of stoppages and rejection of management offers to raise bonuses

and subsidies for different groups of workers, the strike became indefinite on 24 May after the company fired the two employees who had stopped the line. Workers were insisting on a general raise in the base wage and the right to democratically elect the factory's union officers. Production at Honda Nanhai was completely halted – and more. Honda's production method caused delivery shortages of transmission systems to Honda's main factories in Guangzhou and Wuhan in central China. Both factories had to stop production on 26 and 27 May, attracting national and international media attention and making the strike a public issue in China. By the end of May Honda's four assembly plants and many parts plants throughout China were shut down.[38]

At supplier factories such as parts plants the workforce consists mainly of migrant workers – from other parts of China – whose base wage roughly corresponds to the legal minimum wage of 700–900 yuan (€80–100) and whose overtime hours are often excessive. In addition, at the Honda Nanhai transmission-systems factory, about three-quarters of the manual workers are technical school students in internship programs, a common practice in the Pearl River Delta industrial belt. At Honda Nanhai, as in many other cases, work is monotonous and instruction by teachers insufficient. The strike at Honda Nanhai started off as a protest against this practice out of which developed the demand for a substantial increase of the base wage by 800 yuan (€90), a seniority subsidy, a better promotion system and democratic reform of the workplace trade union. More than half of the strikers were interns, angry at being paid substantially below the average wage of their fellow migrant workers.[39]

Strikers issued an open letter to workers and the public on 3 June:

> We urge the company to start serious negotiation with us and accede to our reasonable requests. It earns over 1,000 million yuan every year and this is the fruit of our hard work … we should remain united and be aware of the divisive tactics of the management.[40]

These young employees, according to Au Loong Yu and Bai Ruixue, demonstrated a working-class-consciousness different from their parents' generation of migrant workers, who mostly aspired to return to peasant life in their villages. Their activism pointed towards wider class solidarity in the open letter's declaration:

> Our struggle to defend our rights is not just about fighting for ourselves, the 1,800 workers of Honda. We are concerned about the rights of all the workers in the whole country. We want to set a good example of workers struggling for their rights.[41]

Given the impact on its other plants, this relatively small strike was costing Honda about 240 million yuan per day – proof of the power workers possess at the point of JIT production. During the 17-day conflict, Honda Nanhai workers rejected several management offers before an agreement was settled on 4 June.

Regular workers at the plant received a 32.4 per cent pay increase, the interns around 70 per cent. Honda workers elsewhere gained significant general pay rises during the wave of strikes triggered by the dispute in this small, but crucial, parts factory, after they demanded exactly the same nominal wage increases gained at Honda Nanhai.[42] Workers at Honda's other two parts plants in Guangdong province, one producing exhaust systems and the other vehicle locks, were so inspired by the victory at Foshan they walked out on 7 and 9 June, demanding higher wages, less strenuous working hours and the right to elect union officers. Workers at one of these supplier factories wrote in a 'ba gong chanyi shu' (letter to promote strike): 'Colleagues, watch around us, Foxconn, Honda in Foshan, Toyota in Tianjin … the result is good as long as we can unite till the last moment.'[43]

According to Lu Zhang, the strikes produced a 'ripple effect', with a wave of strikes in several cities pushing a rapid trend towards wage increases.[44] Boy Lüthje reported that 'the events at Honda Nanhai triggered a chain reaction among workers in auto supply and electronics factories throughout the Pearl River Delta', including strikes in eight of Toyota's 14 core suppliers. Most of the strikes in the Delta were settled with raises similar to Nanhai's, so workers had effectively established a kind of pattern bargaining.[45] The linking of the strikes is confirmed by the fact that strike leaders elsewhere contacted workers' representatives in the Foshan factory to seek advice.[46]

The Foshan strike has been described as the starting point for the 2010 strike wave that established the migrant working class as a recognized actor in Chinese society and politics.[47] According to Hao Ren and fellow activists, workers were subsequently more determined, demonstrating solidarity and persistence. Offensive strikes won general wage increases and, in many places, workers demanded that their unions become independent and democratic.[48] This momentous strike wave, discussed in Chapter 4, started with workers at a single workplace creating a shortage of one component.

The problem of size: organizing high-turnover, small workforces

In developed economies, a central problem confronting industrial activists in the post-Fordist period is how to organize workers in decentralized, smaller workplaces, with high workforce turnover created by casualized and other precarious forms of employment. Technology aside, there are important ways in which circumstances nowadays are more similar to late nineteenth-century industrial patterns than to the Fordist mass-production conditions of the bulk of the twentieth century; and with neoliberalism reviving nineteenth-century prejudices against worker 'combination', employer antipathy towards unions is again sanctioned by wider political, social and cultural forces. Not for the first time but once more the labour movement is confronted with the strategic problem of how to organize large numbers of workplaces of varying sizes spread through both rural and urban areas, in a climate again hostile to unionism.[49]

Jeremy Brecher points out that the Knights of Labor in the late nineteenth century responded to a similar strategic problem with a flexible organization that embraced 'all workers of hand or brain' in a particular region, whatever their industry, employer or craft. In this period, too, in the USA as in Britain, Australia and elsewhere, central labour councils were more important in many cities than any particular union, facilitating the organization of many small workplaces in a locality. Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) strategies, like those of the Knights of Labor before them, were also well suited to the realities of late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century patterns of employment; they are apposite again today. Brecher describes the IWW as 'perhaps the greatest experts ever known in utilizing worker power in highly casualized labor markets'. Despite shake-ups and high turnover, they were able in many situations to use group norms, conscious withdrawal of efficiency, surprise work stoppages and similar techniques to win concrete gains for workers who on the face of things appeared powerless. 'IWWs retained their membership right and their identification with the union as they moved from job to unemployment to next job in highly casualized labor markets.'[50]

Knights of Labor and IWW structures and strategies suited the organization of many small workplaces. The IWW was particularly adept too at meeting the needs of the most vulnerable and least skilled workers; and especially renowned for organizing workers from racial and ethnic minorities. Global circumstances resemble those of a century ago, as Jack Kirkpatrick argues in his study of the IWW Cleaners Branch in the UK:

> Globalized and consolidated corporate power, expansion of massive inequality, global migration, a rapidly shifting and changing economy, low pay, job insecurity, low skills, low union density (not to mention organization), especially in the unskilled sectors – all these elements are parallels.[51]

Labour historians are reconsidering the IWW (known still as 'Wobblies') as more than a colourful footnote, exemplars rather than mere precursors of serious unionism. Staughton Lynd claims that the IWW aspiration to build One Big Union, based in shop-floor committees and local committees of workers from all trades, spontaneously created and re-created by a horizontal process in which workers reach out to their counterparts in other places and other countries, is the organizational form required for effective response to the power of multinational corporations.[52]

The IWW has reemerged in the USA, because capitalism has again produced a vast, un-unionized, underpaid, dispersed and fragmented workforce; and the AFL-CIO has been unable to meet the challenge, though sections of it have made brave attempts to do so. Emblematic of the post-Fordist workplace is the fast-food outlet. The typical McDonald's, Wendy's, Subway or Burger King restaurant has fewer than 15 employees.[53] Part of the growing service sector, they are proliferating, especially in developed economies. Such a widely dispersed industry is, from a traditional union perspective, an organizer's nightmare.

Typically, the corporations who own them are viciously anti-union, even in countries with strong labour movement traditions.

McDonald's in France, for example, went to extremes to prevent the unionization of its employees, as Marianne Debouzy relates. To its surprise it failed to outmanoeuvre its young, inexperienced workforce, the usual employees, the forgotten of the labour market: children of immigrant workers, dropouts, indebted students.[54] A Confédération Générale du Travail/General Confederation of Labour (CGT) organizer described McDonald's as 'the laboratory of flexibility and of the disciplining of employees'. Other organizers commented that precarious workers are the 'guinea pigs of deregulation' and 'representative of what is in fact the real state of today's wage-earners'. With the help of the CGT, which taught them about labour law and their rights to attempt to unionize, young McDonald's workers showed their ability to organize, to inform the public and build solidarity networks. They understood that they had to create links with student unions, progressive associations and left-wing groups. They tried various forms of action and were creative in inventing modes of expression (fliers, songs, graphics), always tinged with humour. Observers were struck by their determination and wondered what made these inexperienced youngsters such militant fighters. Commenting on the successful one-year strike of the 30 employees at the Strasbourg-St Denis McDonald's, Debouzy remarks how their vulnerability and lack of experience made their courage and obstinacy all the more noteworthy. 'They were motivated by a strong sense of solidarity and justice as well as a sense of dignity.'[55] The resistance of young workers, she maintains, should give us hope, though the fragmentation of the world of work, the atomization of the workers, the individualization of wages, the weakening of labour law and the decline of unions are real obstacles on the road to rebellion.[56]

According to a Wobbly involved in organizing a fast-food outlet in Minneapolis, the American labour movement is not up to the task because of the legacy of its inter-war past when the ascendant labour bureaucracy cooperated with corporate managers to guarantee labour peace. In allowing closed-door negotiations and courtroom hearings to replace mass meetings and work stoppages, the fighting capacity of the unions atrophied. 'The defanged labor organizations were ill-prepared for the withering corporate assault that began in the 1980s.'[57] So IWW activity persists, even prospers. For example, in November 2014 a fledgling Whole Foods IWW forced management at South of Market Whole Foods in San Francisco to increase its lowest wage-rates by $1.25 an hour to $12.75 an hour in response to a work stoppage and a delegation of cooks, cashiers, stockers and butchers, with a petition signed by over 50 workers at the store. Vowing to continue the demand for a $5 an hour increase, the workers' website stated:

> History proves that workers have the power to make change when we come together to fight for our interests. We are re-igniting a workers' movement where we have power: on the job.… This is our movement, we are capable of victory, and we are worth it.[58]

Large sections of the AFL-CIO have recognized the extent of the problem and sought to put their house in order, and with some success. During the 1980s, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), representing a high proportion of dispersed workplaces and fragmented workforces, defied general trends in American unionism by increasing its density through aggressive methods, devoting 30 per cent of its operating budget to organizing. On the strength of the SEIU's impressive record in expanding its membership base, SEIU president John Sweeney was elected president of the AFL-CIO in 1995 on a 'New Voices' reform slate, the first contested leadership election in its 40-year history. Sweeney's 1996 book, *America Needs a Raise*, and his talk about rebuilding a fighting labour movement matched the mood of rank-and-file unionists. Under Sweeney's presidency from 1995 the AFL-CIO followed the SEIU lead and launched a program prioritizing the organizing of the unorganized, encouraging affiliated unions to spend at least 30 per cent of their budget on grassroots mobilizing and organizing.[59]

An example of emphasis on organizing workers in a highly dispersed service industry was the successful campaign to unionize Californian homecare workers, who look after elderly and disabled people in their homes. Unionizing this extremely disparate group of workers presented formidable challenges. These workers, overwhelmingly non-white and female, were spread out as individual workers in thousands of different homes throughout 4,083 square miles and with no occasion to come together as a group. They spoke more than 100 languages, and, due to low pay, lack of benefits and deaths of clients, their turnover rate was around 40 per cent. However, in 1998, 74,000 homecare workers in LA County elected to join SEIU Local 434B. Similar organizing efforts in other California counties brought the total number of newly unionized Californian homecare workers to more than 100,000 in the decade to 2002.[60]

Unfortunately, Sweeney's team did not continue to provide inspiring leadership and became implicated in bureaucratic deal-making with employers and the Democrats. The AFL-CIO was left behind in the significant strikes from the late 1990s onwards, which demonstrated impressive capacity for solidarity among rank-and-file workers across racial and ethnic lines, a reshaping of US unionism all the more significant for the fact that it took place when conservative forces had ratcheted up their attacks on affirmative action, basic democratic rights and political power for oppressed nationalities. The AFL-CIO experienced a major split in July 2005 and, at its convention in June 2006, the SEIU, Teamsters, UNITE HERE and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) broke away to form a rival, more radical, union federation – the Change to Win coalition – comprising approximately one-third the original federation's membership. The breakaway unions claimed they were forced to depart because they wanted to devote more resources to aggressively organize new members.[61] Jerry Tucker argued the potential benefits of this split. 'The breakup of monopoly unionism, even one precipitated by the barons of the bureaucracy with similarly anemic agendas could force a sinking labor movement to rediscover its greatest strength – its membership and its larger social constituency.'[62]

In the meantime, the IWW was pressing forward with ground-level initiatives outside of official labour movement channels. Commencing with an organizing campaign at Starbucks in New York in the early 2000s, the IWW espoused 'solidarity unionism', based on the premise that solidarity among workers and united action to press demands was what mattered and there was no need for official union recognition via the National Labor Relations Board.[63] Reporters homed in on the David-versus-Goliath fight initiated by the Starbucks Workers Union, with headlines in 2005–2006 such as 'Baristas of the World, Unite! You have nothing to lose but your company mandated cheerfulness' and 'Starbucks Gets Wobbly'.[64]

IWW efforts at other fast-food outlets mushroomed. Erik Forman tells the moving tale of how the Wobblies took on Jimmy John's in Minneapolis between 2007 and 2012.

> Our actions provided the media with fodder for a continuous narrative of a scrappy union of low-wage workers fighting to turn the tides of a forty-year war against the working poor. Unions, community groups, and hundreds of individuals signed a pledge to boycott Jimmy John's if called upon to do so. Our 'air war' of building community support and destroying the [bosses'] credibility and legitimacy was so successful that … customers were wishing us luck with the union fight as they waited in line for their sandwiches.[65]

The most significant advances of the Jimmy John's Workers Union were due to its departures from conventional organizing models: the empowerment of the rank and file in a largely autonomous organizing committee, and a constant focus on fighting for demands and addressing grievances through direct action. This level of militancy, Forman argues, can only be built by organizers thoroughly embedded in the segment of the working class they are organizing, in line with the traditions of the Knights of Labor, IWW and early CIO. 'The combination of empowered organizing committees armed with an arsenal of direct-action tactics constitutes the basis of a new, insurgent organizing model.' Forman predicts that, as economic conditions worsen, larger numbers of workers will become politicized, opening up a dramatic possibility of using this model to build a workers' movement in areas beyond the reach of conventional campaigns relying on a collapsing legal framework, card-check deals or other leverage.[66]

Ground-level organizing in fast-food outlets gained renewed impetus with the spectacular strikes in October 2012 of Walmart workers, involving several thousand employees, including those in one of Walmart's major distribution centres outside Chicago. The aim was to call attention to the substandard wages and working conditions in the largest American corporation and to expose a benefits program that required workers to contribute a substantial portion of their meagre wages. Although the strikers did not seek union recognition or expect to win a collective bargaining agreement, their campaign was sponsored and funded by the UFCW, a 1.3 million-member affiliate of the Change to Win coalition. UFCW's membership includes workers in packing houses, chemical firms, and

retail food and department stores.[67] This movement indicated that the most radical wing of American unionism, Change to Win, was prepared to tackle a notoriously difficult case, respond to extraordinary challenges and adapt its methods accordingly. In March 2015, Walmart agreed to raise its base wage to $10 an hour.[68]

The 2012 Walmart actions were followed by waves of walkouts by fast-food workers across the country, commencing 29 November 2012 in New York with 200 workers at McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, Domino's, Papa John's, Pizza Hut and KFC together walking off the job. Hundreds demonstrated at Grand Central Station, in protest against poverty wages that rarely exceeded $10 an hour, and demanded a wage of $15 an hour. These actions were coordinated by the SEIU and New York community groups.[69]

During 2013 the movement spread and intensified, with increasing numbers of fast-food workers walking off their jobs in particular cities on specified dates, including a nationwide effort on 6 December 2013. The campaign, largely funded and directed by the SEIU, overcame the delays and difficulties of the usual ways of conducting union business. Rather than organizing store-by-store to try to win unionization elections or attempting to shut down stores with strikes, the tactic used one-day walkouts, usually involving just a minority of the workforce. These generated much publicity and public recognition to exert political and legal pressure.[70] The slogan of the dedicated website at http://strikefastfood.org is 'Low Pay Is Not OK.' A video from the #StrikeFastFood actions in Milwaukee on 4 December 2014 noted: 'This movement isn't about one mall or one store, it's about the vast corporations who make billions of dollars in profits while workers struggle on public assistance.'[71]

The movement went international during 2014. On 15 May fast-food workers went on strike, often accompanied by supporting protesters, in 230 cities around the world, not just in the USA but also in Brazil, the UK, Belgium, Philippines, India and Japan. Workers held a flash mob inside a McDonald's in Manila, singing and dancing to 'Let It Go', urging McDonald's to 'let go' of its low wages and allow workers to unionize. Protesters in Brussels shut down a McDonald's at lunchtime; protesters in Mumbai were undeterred by threats of arrest; and protesters in nearly every prefecture in Japan called on McDonald's to pay workers 1,500 yen.[72]

Back in the USA, another nationwide campaign of walkouts affected fast-food outlets in 150 cities on 4 September 2014, this time involving acts of civil disobedience such as sit-ins to attract attention, provoking hundreds of arrests.[73] On 4 December 2014, fast-food workers in record numbers walked off the job in 190 cities, the most widespread walkout since they began two years earlier. Walmart workers joined them and, for the first time, convenience and dollar store workers, and workers from 10 major airports. Homecare providers protested in 24 cities.[74]

In Denver, for example, the turnout was large and vocal on the 16th Street Mall for morning and afternoon actions in which fast-food workers called for $15 an hour and unionization rights, as part of the nationwide event. SEIU Local

105 posted online photos of the gatherings and information about events across the country.[75] Actions elsewhere were deliberately confronting. For instance, in Atlanta, fast-food workers, homecare providers, SEIU members and other supporters took over the KFC parking lot then marched to a dollar store, carrying a banner reading 'Support Fast Food Workers. Fight for $15/Hour and the Right to Join a Union!' and chanting 'Hands up! Don't shoot!', a cry repeated in other cities. In LA placards asserted 'Jobs with a Livable Wage, not Racism and Police Murder.'[76] At a Speedway in St Louis, workers started their strike by lying down inside their store, another act of protest against the killings of unarmed African Americans by police.[77] Hundreds of strikers from over 16 Wisconsin communities participated in events which were marked by worker walkouts, banner drops, a march through a city mall, and chants and actions that honoured the BlackLivesMatter movement.[78]

The idea, according to Josh Eidelson in *Bloomberg Business*, is to compel the top national fast-food corporations to agree to increase pay and make it easier for workers to unionize. Protests have spread further and accomplished more than people thought possible when a few hundred fast-food workers in New York staged the first strike of its kind in a union-free industry. So far, the strikers have spurred improvements at individual stores, as well as legislation in cities across the country to mandate major hikes in the minimum wage.[79] The root of the anger is inequality, according to Mark Bittman in the *New York Times*. He notes that the demands of the fast-food workers movement – $15 minimum wage and a union – have helped to unite movements among airport workers, hospital workers, retail workers and more. Two years ago, there was talk of raising the minimum wage to $10; now $15 per hour is seen as the bare minimum. Seattle and San Francisco have already mandated $15, Chicago's City Council voted to gradually increase to a $13 minimum by 2019, Oakland was to move to $12.25 in March and Los Angeles to consider a proposal. Although the amounts were woefully inadequate, four Republican states voted late in 2014 to approve minimum wage increases, indicating the concept resonates across party lines.[80]

'Fast Food Forward' Organizing Director Kendall Fells stated: 'I remember everybody just saying these workers are crazy to ask for $15 an hour. Now it's become clear that the workers are not crazy.' While some politicians have embraced the call for $15, the fast-food industry remains defiant. The National Restaurant Association denounced the 'union-led demonstrations' as 'orchestrated PR events designed to push their own agenda while attacking an industry that provides opportunity to millions of Americans'. Organizers insist they have made big strides toward forcing fast-food giants to negotiate. 'We haven't had conversations with McDonald's', said Fells, 'but all indications are that they are in a frenzy inside.'[81] Noting that the fast-food industry rakes in $200 billion annually, by exploiting their workforces, *Workers World* enthused on 9 December 2014 that each action in the nationally coordinated campaign has brought more workers in more cities into the streets. 'As they feel their power in united actions, the strikers attract more solidarity and inspire other workers to participate.'[82]

The 'Fight for $15' campaign continues. In March 2015 McDonald's announced it was raising its stores' minimum hourly wage to $9 and $10 in 2016; Target and Walmart made similar concessions. Economics professor Robert Pollin commented that they were afraid of unionization and hoped to quell the movement by making small gestures: 'these corporations are not taking these actions just to be nice. They're taking them because they're being forced to by the strength of this movement.'[83]

On 15 April 2015, there were nationwide protest actions in 230 cities, supported by solidarity protests in 125 cities around the world, the largest mobilization of underpaid workers in history according to organizers. In San Francisco, where the widening income gap has the city rated alongside Rwanda when using the World Bank's poverty gap index, 100 protesters marched into McDonald's in the Latino Mission district, shutting it down for an hour. Demonstrators from unions and community groups were addressed by SEIU international president Mary Kay Henry. They chanted 'Hold the Burgers. Hold the Fries. We want our wages Supersized!' San Francisco Labor Council delegate Carl Finamore stated that this movement for social and economic justice was well organized with a recognized leadership, a national and even internationally coordinated organizing strategy and clear, focused claims. The $15 an hour demand is simple, specific, easily understood and achievable. It appeals to millions of Americans, captures the spotlight and becomes the focus of a national discussion about poverty and income inequality. According to Labor Council executive director Tim Paulson, 'We are turning the conversation away from attacking workers' wages and pensions into supporting a living wage for all. It's something that resonates with millions across the political spectrum and across every region.'[84] Watch this space.

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3 Reversing decline by going online?

> the ever-expanding union of the workers … is helped on by the improved means of communication that are created by modern industry and that place the workers of different localities in contact with one another.
>
> (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, p. 43)

The issue of union membership levels

Workers are pulled into unions by the prospect of better wages and conditions. Trends associated with globalization work against the ability of unions to provide these items as effectively as before. Even if workers are dissatisfied, they might shy away from seeking union representation to the degree they perceive unions are powerless to make things better. In general, the effectiveness of the strike threat has declined, caused by the increased capacity of employers to relocate production to other plants or countries and to hire non-union replacement workers in a context of increased unemployment. Heightened management opposition to unions, encouraged by neoliberal management culture, makes it more difficult for unions to win in these matters.[1]

These developments are part of the explanation for declining levels of union membership in most developed countries. This process was well under way by the end of the twentieth century.[2] For example, Australian trade union membership declined from 56 per cent of the workforce in 1975 to 25 per cent in 1998. This trajectory was typical of traditionally well-unionized advanced economies, such as Britain and Italy, which both declined from 55 and 45 percent respectively in the late 1970s to 30 per cent by the late 1990s. Not well unionized historically, USA density declined from 20 per cent in 1980 to 15 per cent by the late 1990s. These trends continued in the new century. By 2014 Australian membership had declined to 17 per cent; and US density to 11.1 per cent of all non-agricultural workers (6.6 in the private sector, 35.7 per cent in the public sector).[3]

Do union membership levels matter? The ability of French unions to stage militant actions puts into perspective the tendency to problematize declining

union densities in other advanced industrialized countries. French union membership, with its strong syndicalist traditions, is a membership of activists, typically around a mere 10 per cent of the workforce. In 2011 Samir Amin suggested that fewer members might be a source of strength rather than weakness. He contrasts the 'strong union' countries of Germany and the UK, whose working classes have accepted the drastic downward adjustments imposed by capital over the course of the last 30 years, with the supposedly 'weak' low-density French unions, which have better (or less badly) resisted such adjustments. 'This reality simply reminds us that organizations of activists, by definition minoritarian (since it is impossible that the class as a whole should be made up of activists), are more able than 'mass' (and thus made up largely of non-activists) unions to lead majorities into struggle.'[4] Thomas Geoghegan, determined though he is to defend US unionism, admits he wonders whether it might not be better if the right succeeded in destroying organized labour, so unions would be forced into relying on the active support of the people they seek to represent, as well as the larger public.[5]

Whether it matters or not on the ground, declining membership rates fortify conventional political discourse in most developed countries that accepts to varying degrees the neoliberal storyline that unions are dying. Bruce Kaufman refers to the neoliberal-postmodern narrative that presents unions and labour struggles as outmoded, as stodgy, out-of-date institutions more relevant to a smokestack/blue-collar economy.[6] Since the early 1980s unions have embraced the new communication technologies associated with globalization to try in varied ways to counteract the factors causing membership decline and also to convey the message of unionism and its benefits to wider constituencies.

Richard Freeman points out optimistically that spurts in union growth are historically associated with new union forms that attract previously non-organizable groups of workers or with the development of new ways of operating that greatly weaken employer resistance. 'If there is one message from labor history for the future of unions, it is that *if unionism manages to recover from the endangered species list, it will be through a new growth spurt associated with some new union form and new mode of operating.*' By studying examples of innovative unions early this millennium, he concluded that the new union form that could contribute to union growth made extensive use of information communication technologies, particularly the internet, to deliver services to members and surmount employer opposition. With Joel Rogers, he called this 'open-source unionism'.[7]

Freeman proceeded from the premise that unions will shy away from providing services and organizing workplaces if the cost of such activity exceeds the benefits. This likelihood was exacerbated in the anti-union climate of recent times, which increases the costs of recruitment.

> But modern computer technology, particularly the advent of the Internet as a major source of information and communication, greatly alters this benefit-cost calculation for unionizing workers outside of collective bargaining. The

> Internet makes it cost effective for unions to deliver union services to minorities of workers across workplaces and for individual workers or groups of workers to coordinate with each other regardless of the collective bargaining status of their workplace.[8]

Naturally, any new union form must create the face-to-face human interactions that build the trust and solidarity that lie at the heart of any collective organization. The least-cost way is in a local geographic area, so the new union form would need a strong local basis, through city labour councils or other units that transcend particular workplaces. 'It is the combination of local organization with broader Internet-based global linkages that provide the basis for open-source unionism.'[9] Freeman's vision is being realized to the extent that unions everywhere are utilizing online technology and finding it hugely valuable, in the same way that it aids progressive political activism in general, as many studies emphasize.[10]

The early history of labour and the internet: 1981–2005

The labour movement was quick to spot the potential of computer-mediated communication to aid workplace organization and connect workers directly with each other during struggles. The existence of the internet in its earliest forms remained hidden from most people until the early 1990s. Only those most technologically proficient were using networks such as electronic bulletin boards, but trade unionists were using these by the early 1980s. By 1990 they were already holding international meetings to discuss their experience. How was union use of such technology so cutting-edge? Eric Lee explains:

> There are always some crazy people hanging around the labour movement, sometimes in positions of power, who will push forward an idea whose time has come.… They fought an uphill battle against overwhelming odds, but they sometimes got what they wanted. Trade unions adopted new and untried technologies sometimes even before corporations and governments did.[11]

The first electronic labour network was created in 1981 by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), representing 40,000 primary and secondary school teachers across a province four times the size of Great Britain. It was used with great effect to strengthen the union. By 1983, when the union launched a province-wide strike, every local branch had a computer terminal; they were online and ready. They put out messages updating each other on strike news, which were photocopied and handed out to teachers on picket lines. These not only gave the striking teachers a sense of solidarity across hundreds of kilometres, but showed them their union could use innovative technology in their interests. Union president Larry Kuehn recalled: 'the BCTF seemed unafraid of the future and what it would bring. That's one of the messages a union broadcasts to its members – and others – when it adopts a new technology, like computer networking. It's a way of

saying: we're changing because we intend to survive'. Not just strike activities but regular, 'peacetime' functions of the union were facilitated by the electronic bulletin board. The BCTH grew stronger because of its early adoption of computer networking.[12]

Arthur Shostak provided valuable resources for union activists wishing to exploit the potential of computer-mediated communication in his aptly titled books. *CyberUnion: Empowering Labor Through Computer Technology* maintained that, where organized labour was concerned, something remarkable was happening. 'Experiments are going on with empowering computer systems that just might help Labor transform its culture, redefine its mission, and reinvent itself.' Despite the ominous slide in union density and clout, Shostak remained hopeful, 'knowing also of Labor's indispensability in the workplace, its iron will to survive, and its uncanny knack for coming up with strategic reform aids'. To turn computer-mediated communication to the greatest advantage, he proposed a model called a CyberUnion, which uses it to provide foreknowledge, raise consciousness, provide services and respect traditions.[13] His 2002 edited collection, *The CyberUnion Handbook. Transforming Labor Through Computer Technology*, provided examples of how unions had transformed themselves and their ability to serve their members: innovative ways to provide information, achieve solidarity, offer services and honour traditions; and in ways that promoted union democracy, union militancy and union organizing.[14] The same year Jane Wills provided another constructive collection, *Union Futures: Building Networked Trade Unionism in the UK*.[15]

Labour activists were well aware of potential dangers of bosses monitoring their communications. IT worker Santiago informed Sydney researcher Andrew Viller in 2003 that management would enlist his skills to conduct surveillance on co-workers to facilitate downsizing. He would be asked to trawl through the data on end-users' computers, searching for any information, such as emails or website addresses, which would conflict with company policy, giving management the excuse to terminate employment, so he would warn co-workers to delete sections of their hard-drives to make it more difficult for data to be found.[16] Notwithstanding such risks, there was much turn-of-the-millennium enthusiasm in labour circles for the internet. Dyer-Witheford argued that, with the aid of the technology associated with globalization, unions had an even greater potential for mobilization than the burgeoning labour movements a century ago.[17] Hyman maintained that intelligent use of new modes of communication could assist not just in routine organization but also in the work of consciousness-building. 'With imagination, unions may transform themselves and build an emancipatory potential for labour in the new millennium. Forward to the virtual trade union of the future!'[18]

It is hardly surprising that IT workers were at the forefront of endeavours to develop virtual unions. In October 2001, the IT Workers Alliance (ITWA) website, an international 'virtual union' was launched at www.itworkers-alliance.org. In what was then novel, the ITWA website posted regular articles on the industry and provided information about organizing efforts for IT workers

by unions in their locality. The most interesting feature of the website, which anticipated the interactivity of Web 2.0, was the open forums where workers could begin 'threads' of discussion regarding particular issues or incidents within the industry. Within 48 hours of its online launch, ITWA had received 1,895 visitors, signed up 70 subscriptions to the news list, handled five enquiries from IT workers needing help and received 22 applications to join a real union with a stake in the industry via the site's electronic Join-a-Union form at http://itworkers-alliance.org/home/join/html. Several of these applications were from programmers in Brazil, in São Paulo's boom IT industry. While functioning online as a source of information and advice, ITWA encourages traditional forms of organization and attempts to funnel potential members into relevant unions.[19] ITWA is still alive in cyberspace, permitting each visitor to access relevant country-based links. IT workers in the UK, for instance, can click on options such as Unite Union Phone Number, Unite Union Website, Unison Credit Union, National Trades Union, CWU Union, Union workers Credit Services and Union Representatives.[20]

In 2005 Freeman researched UK and US unions' use of the internet to deliver union services. In the UK, the only union with a website in 1995 was Unison. By 2001 there were 373 union websites in the UK, but the bulk of these were 'signpost websites' that gave minimal information. In 2002 the TUC developed workSMART at www.worksmart.org.uk 'to help today's working people get the best out of the world of work'. Aimed more at non-unionized than unionized workers, it contained information about workplace problems and links to sources of worker rights advice, such as those offered on the TUC website. Under the heading 'Benefits for union members', it states: 'If you are in a union you can also ask them for advice. Unions are experts at solving problems at work. Use the workSMART unionfinder to contact a union in your work sector.' The TUC's embrace of internet technology and enhanced website set a standard to which individual unions responded. Union leaders recognized the need for effective web-based strategies to carry out functions. Over the next few years UK unions significantly improved their websites with the help of standardized commercial programs and the professional expertise in many unions of technologically skilled workers. US unions, Freeman found, were generally even more advanced in internet usage than UK unions. He particularly approved the SEIU's explicitly open-source designed www.purpleocean.org with the goal of enlisting a million members in the near future. With SEIU the most successful and innovative union in the US, increasing membership in the 1980s–1990s through organizing campaigns, he hoped its decision to develop an open-source form would have immense spillover effects on the entire US labour movement.[21]

In addition to its effectiveness for workplace organization at immediate, even mundane, levels, the technology is constructively deployed for political campaigns waged at national level by peak union bodies. For example, the 2005–07 'Your Rights at Work' campaign of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) combined ingenious uses of computer-mediated communication with traditional organizing through communities. Aimed at the conservative government's industrial

relations agenda, the campaign was a major influence over people's votes and the Labor Party's victory in the November 2007 election. It projected an image of family-friendly contemporary unionism, reinvigorated the union movement, attracted new activists and demonstrated to the public that unions were relevant and concerned with contemporary day-to-day issues – and able to use its power and influence to protect wages and conditions.[22]

Ironically, unions started to use their websites to contribute to labour movement culture deemed archaic in mainstream media. Knowledge of past struggles, successful and unsuccessful, has always been important in building solidarity and providing strategic lessons for the present and future. Lectures at mechanics' institutes and the embroidering of elaborate union banners are being replaced or supplemented by digital forms of providing collective memory. Unions use websites, with text, pictures and video clips of past struggles to encourage working-class consciousness. The LabourStart websites, for example, have a standing feature, 'This month in labour history', with snippets about past struggles won or lost, industrial accidents, labour heroes hatched or despatched, and so on.[23]

Labour culture online might seem anachronistic, but it also makes sense as a way of acquainting younger workers in particular with ideas about the value of collective workplace organization. There are huge challenges facing unions attempting to attract new generations of workers who have grown up bombarded by neoliberal messaging, who have not experienced the presence of unions in their workplaces or in their recent family backgrounds. The collectivist values of unionism come up against the dominance of individualist values.[24] The internet bridges the gap between an increasingly heterogeneous and individualistic workforce and the collective activity and solidarity that lies at the heart of unionism.[25] Because younger workers are 'digital natives', they may feel more at ease online than at a traditional union meeting. Online resources could speak to them more clearly than a union representative as they experience workplace exploitation and perhaps develop inchoate collectivist consciousness, despite the neoliberal culture in which they are otherwise embedded.

Workers of the world, unite online?

Online technology – so important in how corporations conduct business in the globalization era – obviously also enables labour organizations to connect with each other across national borders. The ever-expanding union of workers *internationally* is undeniably helped by improved means of communication. By 2001, the labour movement's 'net-internationalism', according to Stuart Hodkinson, was being used in three overlapping ways: the informational, the organizational and the solidaristic.[26] The ability of unions to use the internet to construct international early warning systems, to alert other unions to impending attacks by employers; and to organize transnational industrial solidarity during conflicts, was a significant development during the 1990s. For instance, in 1997 the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, based in the US and Canada and representing approximately 647,000 employees in more than 200

industries, refused to service British Airways (BA) aircraft during a strike by BA flight attendants.[27]

Historically, maritime workers have used real-life international connections forged between them from their peripatetic working lives to foster solidarity across regions of the world. From the 1990s the internet added immediacy to this traditional connectivity of maritime workers' unions. Easily and instantly alerted during the Liverpool dockworkers' dispute in 1997, unionized waterfront workers in the USA, Canada, Australia and Japan, various European and other countries, engaged in coordinated strikes targeting shipping lines using the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company port in Liverpool. Although the Liverpool dockers were ultimately defeated by a vindictive company that dismissed its entire workforce and replaced them with un-unionized casuals, maritime unions' transnational connections were strengthened and an International Dockworkers Council established.[28]

This deepening of maritime labour transnationalism helped the following year when Australian unions were battling to protect the right to organize on the waterfront. International solidarity actions, such as secondary industrial actions by the ILWU, representing dockworkers on the strategically significant west coast of the USA and Canada, were more easily arranged. Dockworkers around the globe forced scab-loaded containers to be shipped back to Australia and reloaded by union labour. Moreover, waterfront workers in Dubai used the internet to alert the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) that a workforce of strike-breakers was being trained there, secretly. Forewarned is forearmed. This advance notice of employer intentions to lock out the unionized workforce enabled the MUA to mobilize 'community pickets' that prevented strike-breakers from working. The stevedoring company backed down; the workers won the right to remain unionized and even received a wage increase and back-pay for the period of the dispute.[29]

The use of computer-mediated communication to facilitate international working-class cooperation is now routine and commonplace, but in the 1990s it represented a novel and inspiring development that seemed to point to immense possibilities to outmaneouvre capital or at least outwit corporations on opportune occasions. In 2003 George Myconos suggested that what was then a 'remarkable increase in instantaneous, computer-mediated interaction' meant that vital information was being so easily and cost-effectively disseminated across the network of transnational labour organizations it constituted a new pattern of interaction that provided the basis of more profound integration. Virtual communion helped overcome financial, cultural, logistical and ideological differences. The workers of the world were at long last uniting in practice. Labour worldwide had expanded organizationally and become more symbolically and ideologically integrated, enabling organized labour to advocate for trade unionists on a global basis.[30]

However, Myconos' 2005 study of the transnational network of labour organizations concluded that even though communications technology enabled this network to grow more integrated and engaged in a deeper form of globalization,

it had done so in ways that did not entail a turning away from the nation-state.[31] In principle, though, the technology that underpins globalization should enable transcendence of national orientations, further deepening labour transnationalism. Waterman contends that, in the twenty-first century, it is both possible and necessary for the labour movement to discard its twentieth-century emphasis upon taking power within each nation-state, which created societies marked by statism that in no way surpassed capitalism. Technology now permits the movement to draw sustenance from the nineteenth-century Marxist presentation of the labour movement as an anti-capitalist internationalism. Global informational capitalism provides more favourable terrains for emancipatory movements than those of an internationalized industrial capitalism.[32]

Online technology has underpinned the significant expansion and capacity of the formal institutions of labour transnationalism embodied in Global Unions, discussed in Chapter 5. At the same time there has also been a proliferation of less formal online manifestations of international proletarian solidarity, focused on providing information about workers' struggles around the world: not just what is happening but also how workers elsewhere may assist. There is, as various authors argue, a correlation between informational networks and international solidarity actions.[33]

There are many varieties of online labour transnationalism that do not require elaborate bureaucratic apparatuses. In their contemporary forms, they resemble revered long-standing international labour movement practices, but with the significant new advantage of instantaneous global communication. Overarching bureaucratic structures are unnecessary; straightforward interaction between organizations or individual activists is the only precondition for transnational expressions of solidarity, rhetorical and practical, to take place. A century ago and more, unions sent money to strikers on the other side of the world. Global labour activists wrote copious letters to each other, continuing connections begun in real-life encounters during wandering lives or reaching out to like-minded militants never met but mentioned in the labour movement newspapers of the time.

The equivalent of this exchange of information and networking are the international labour websites that have emerged from the 1990s, which flourish as labour news aggregation sites, such as Labor Notes and UnionBook. Some are run or endorsed by unions, others are independent initiatives of labour activists. The New Unionism Network launched in 2007 reminded its thousands of viewers of Jo Freeman's classic article from the 1970s warning radical movements of 'the tyranny of structurelessness'. 'A structured group always has formal structure, and may also have an informal, or covert, structure. It is this informal structure, particularly Unstructured groups, which forms the basis for elites.'[34] Waterman points out that, although many of the sites are oriented toward and sometimes dependent on inter/national union support – moral or material – their position on the union periphery and their cyberspace awareness and activity means they can do things that traditionally earth-bound unions cannot.[35]

Labour in cyberspace enables sympathetic academics and scholars, Andreas Bieler for example, to provide encyclopaedic information about issues and struggles, and ideas to inform strategies.[36] Waterman, too, has been a tireless online champion and presenter of ideas for global campaigns, such as those for much shorter working hours, 'A global Campaign for Useful Work', the 'All in Common' campaign for the defence and extension of forms of common ownership and control, and the Global Labour Charter Movement. It is the existence of cyberspace, he insists, that makes it all conceivable. 'We have here not simply a new communications technology but the possibility for developing non-hierarchical, dialogical, equal relations worldwide.'[37]

London-based Eric Lee established the LabourStart website in 1997 to serve the international union movement by collecting and disseminating news from and about unions and workers' organizations around the world. Information is collected from mainstream, union and alternative news sources by volunteer correspondents based in every continent, numbering almost 900 by 2015. By 2010 the site had over 60,000 subscribers and was offered in 23 language editions with an average of 250 stories per day.[38] The tagline for its November 2011 conference in Istanbul was 'From social networks to social revolutions.'[39] By 2013 it had an estimated monthly reach of over 700,000.[40] Canadian online labour activist Derek Blackadder describes it as 'the most successful effort at global digital solidarity for workers'. He emphasizes that LabourStart is a coalition of trade unionists who share only an interest in using the internet to better connect and inform unionists around the world; it has no desire to analyse struggles, determine if they are legitimate or build a strategy that does more good than harm, for that must be left to the institutions of the labour movement.[41]

RadioLabour, the international labour movement's radio service 'Bringing Labour's Voices to the World', provides labour movement news from around the globe in audio-format, mostly items of two to five minutes, but sometimes longer. The range is extraordinary. In March 2015 about 150 items included: 'East African unions working together for decent work'; 'A million migrant workers live in slave-like conditions in Qatar', '500,000 public sector workers in Peru losing right to bargain', 'How multinationals evade responsibility for treating workers fairly', 'Ebola health care workers who have died deserve to be remembered', 'Hong Kong unions fight for democracy', 'Is COSATU breaking up?', '100,000 march in Brussels against austerity measures', 'Self-policing by garment companies is ineffective and dangerous', 'International labour demands re-vote on Qatar's holding of the 2022 World Cup of Football', 'LIDL-Poland refuses to bargain and fires unionists', 'Chips for Apple's iPhone 6 produced by company which fired union leaders', 'Global food workers' union campaigns to reinstate fired Egyptian union organizers', 'Call centre workers in Philippines call out for justice', 'Corporate birds of prey circling public education', 'European unions to protect migrant workers from far-right parties', 'Increased number of unions in Burma' and 'Fighting for union rights in Sierre Leone'.[42]

Global Labor Strategies (GLS) started life during the 1990s as an attempt to use online strategies to build working-class communities; it established and

maintained a large informal network of North American contingent workers. It was then launched internationally in 2003 with the goal of contributing to building global labour solidarity through research, analysis, strategic thinking and network building around labour and employment issues. By 2008 its blog observed that GLS could never have hoped to so quickly and cheaply carve out its global audience.[43] In addition to reports on matters such as outsourcing and contingent workers, its staff wrote and produced an Emmy-nominated documentary, *Global Village or Global Pillage?* Its Global Labor Blog targets people concerned with discussing long-term, strategic questions of worker representation in the global economy.[44]

Union Solidarity International (USI) focuses directly on the development of specifically union-friendly technology to aid labour transnationalism. Supported by unions in the UK, Ireland, Brazil, Greece Austria, North America, Europe, South Africa and Australia, and organizations such as the Global Labour Institute, it 'aims to build grassroots international union solidarity using the latest technology', connecting unionists around the world to promote effective international solidarity action through campaigns, fundraising, web conferencing and written blogs by workers and academics across the globe, information exchange and twinning between workplaces in different countries.[45] USI believes the new technology offers union activists a fantastic opportunity to organize and mobilize, but stresses that technology is not neutral. 'All technology is political, and it's useful to think through the politics if we are going to use it. This will help us to stay in control, and not be manipulated by subtle design elements.'[46] Trying to organize people on Facebook is hard, it points out, when your followers are distracted by paid advertising and Farmville, and Facebook is restricting the reach of your posts unless you cough up for adverts; and all this made worse by Facebook disciplinaries – people getting into trouble at work for things they say online. That is why USI built its Organising Network on Elgg, which is open source. Organising Network 'allows you to create groups, organize meetings, make proposals and vote on them'. Its plugins enable democratic decision-making via online discussion and meetings on its web-conferencing facility, all hosted on a secure server created by a left-wing technological membership organization, Mayfirst.org.[47]

Traditional labour movement dates like May Day are given new leases of life online, but USI's caution about the technology is perceptive. Communication is the nervous system of internationalism and solidarity. The material underpinning of global solidarity is the space that Waterman and Laurence Cox call Cyberia, which is just as much a disputed terrain as any other creation of class society; 'if there is a massive emancipatory *potential*, the technology is systematically restricted, exploited, used for commoditization, capital accumulation, surveillance, manipulation and warfare'.[48] These issues have become more pressing in the new technological stage of Web 2.0 that labour movements, like the rest of the world, have entered.

Labour in the Web 2.0 world

Enthusiastic early adopters, unions and worker activists have been quick to embrace each development in computer-mediated communication to solidify already supportive audiences and reach out to people ambivalent about unionism or even hostile. In the Web 1.0 world until the mid-2000s, unions' common deployment of the new technology was as an additional tool for customary methods of labour organization and mobilization; and it was accepted readily, often in pioneering ways, for such purposes. Even the establishment of virtual unions, as in the case of ITWA, was used primarily to encourage real-world union membership. Labour studies academics and labour activists in this early period mostly stressed the uncomplicated benefits of new technology as an add-on strategy, another communication tool to make standard union tasks easier, to reach members and potential members more cost-effectively and in greater numbers than previously possible. There was broad agreement that computer-mediated communication was immensely valuable for workplace organization and labour mobilization.[49]

However, the internet has evolved from its first generation as a static information portal (e.g. websites) to one marked by the explosion of user-generated and interactive content, such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, media sharing sites and more, the largest increase in human expressive capability in history, according to net theorist Clay Shirky. International Web 2.0 conferences commenced in 2004 after a gestation period of some years, but the birth of Web 2.0 was famously announced in 2006 when *Time* magazine decided its Person of the Year was You, the masses of users participating in content creation via Web 2.0 technology. 'It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes.'[50]

The Web 2.0 world has been described as a place where workers can 'use social networking tools to quickly reach across national and workplace borders, outflank their bosses, and wield collective power'.[51] At the dawn of Web 2.0, GLS advised unions to build freewheeling electronic spaces where workers and others can share, debate and collaborate.[52] The power of new social media for unions, according to Brad Walchuk, is about mobilizing members, educating the public, managing and sharing a message, acting as a counterbalance to the mainstream media, reaching existing members and connecting with new ones. 'It is certainly about engaging young workers, and likely about much more.'[53]

Social media clearly provide innovative ways for unions to present their news and views to members and non-members alike, strengthening membership at the same time as connecting with the world beyond the union to broaden their public appeal and relevance.[54] However, labour movements are now faced with the challenge as well as the powerful potential of the latest technology. Web 2.0, unlike Web 1.0, has prompted debate within labour movements globally, with some strategists arguing that a stage has been reached where the internet is making organizing harder rather easier, as anticipated and earlier proclaimed. In

2008 Eric Lee, enthusiast for union use of new technology, posted online an article entitled 'How the Internet Makes Organizing Harder'.[55] Before returning to these issues, we take a glimpse at union applications of Web 2.0 and take a particular peek at the relatively unproblematic usage of YouTube and the possibly portentous exercise of virtual militancy.

With the internet now encouraging participation not just information-seeking, unions have adapted their earlier patterns of internet usage. However, this technology has also empowered workers as individual activists, because Web 2.0 does not require the institutional underpinning more typical of Web 1.0. Web 2.0 users are also less likely to be plugged in to a desktop computer. Smart phones and other web-enabled portable devices are becoming cheaper and more powerful, levelling the technological playing field. As early as 2008 in South Africa, for example, mobile phone penetration was 95 per cent. Lee parsed out the uses of Twitter to allow workers to communicate by mobile phone across borders and workplaces for free, a significant development in online labour mobilization.[56]

In the late noughties, blogs became common as a tactic in industrial disputes; and these are usually contributions of militants as individuals or as groups, independently of labour organizations. For example, in France in 2008: workers at a subsidiary of Fnac, a retailer, used a blog to rally support and gather evidence for a redundancy protest, which they then took to employment tribunals; workers at a Savoy furniture firm used a blog in a campaign that won them an improved redundancy offer; and at La Redoute, another store chain, workers set up a blog called 'On redoute La Redoute' (We fear La Redoute) to stay informed about possible closures of branches and call-centres, and to organize resistance.[57] The use of workers' blogs in labour struggles in the Delhi industrial belt is discussed in the next chapter.

Blackadder has enthused about how the Walmart campaign, described in the previous chapter, was able to take people from cyberspace to meatspace in order to take effective action. The strike organizers created a mediated, but free-wheeling online space where workers could express their fears and needs, and why they were or were not participating in actions. Much of the online organizing in preparation for the strikes was done by crowd-sourced online leadership that organically defined the campaign. Typically, a number of workers would find a Making Change website or Facebook page or group. They would start to talk directly, rather than through Making Change's facilities. That talking became self-organizing, and the self-organizing took control of the strike in a location. The pattern was repeated, over and over.[58]

At ground level in China – because industrial struggle is largely conducted independently of the official unions – new social media is crucial. For example, during the massive self-organized strike by 50,000 workers in six shoe factories in Dongguan in April 2014, workers used their smart-phones and internet chat-rooms to mobilize, and were able to do so secretly to avoid retaliation by management. A blog in relation to this strike summarizes the situation generally in China: 'Workers' ability to organize and struggle has increased in past years

through the usage of social media.' It describes how smart-phones have brought the internet into the pockets of millions of workers, while new software such as the Chinese Twitter-like weibo and WeChat have enabled them to send reports, photos and films. 'Both are used for organizing as well as public exposure of working conditions in order to put pressure on capital and the state. Meanwhile, the dominance of the state media has been undermined.'[59] Workplace activists have been quick to exploit each new technological development. So too have unions.

Shortly after the emergence of Facebook, an affiliate local of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour set up a closed (invitation-only-membership) Facebook group during a strike. 'It was an amazing way of communicating during the strike' according to the president. Group members continued to use the Facebook group to communicate with each other as a local, using it to quietly share everything from information about shift changes to rally announcements. Such uses quickly became standard. 'A few years ago it was a little exotic to have a decent webpage', Canada's independent labour magazine commented late in 2011. 'Now, unions and other labour organizations are investing in highly functional, interactive websites; ongoing information sharing, 140 characters at a time, on Twitter; videos on websites and uploaded to YouTube; and Facebook pages, updated daily.' Unions were building web pages, using Blogger and WordPress, and embedding code for videos on YouTube.[60] By February 2012, the 10 largest unions in English-speaking Canada counted 23,479 Twitter followers and 23,756 total Facebook likes.[61]

Brazilian unions have been especially effective in using new social media. A report by USI found Brazilian unions 'years ahead' in the highly innovative ways they used new social media to enhance their communication, but not as a replacement for branch meetings and newsletters. Brazilian unions campaign actively for 'digital inclusion', arguing access to broadband and training are important issues. They provide training for their activists in using new technology politically. They make important information easily accessible, invaluable for union representatives entering negotiations for better conditions. They argue new media influences the ideas workers hold and counteracts a lot of the negative propaganda in mainstream media, but warn that Facebook and Twitter, while excellent for reaching people, have aims not necessarily congruent with that of the labour movement, so the labour movement needs to work with free and open-source software to prevent the proprietary software monopoly from stifling union organizing. The union-owned TV station aired a program showcasing unions' creative use of new technology.[62]

Above the level of individual unions, peak union bodies in countries around the world run websites of varying degrees of sophistication and interactivity. They also use social media to reach the unorganized, for example, the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions' 'Together' social network site launched in 2011. 'Together aims to connect workers in un-unionized work places with the union movement and the union experience.' To do this, it provides help with issues like workplace bullying, sick leave, holiday pay, employment arrangements and sexual

harassment. It aims to cut across regional, sectoral and strategic lines to reach the growing cohort of workers who do not fit into the standard labourist model of industrial capitalism: people on casual contracts; those in IT industries, tourism, small shops, or driving taxis; workers in remote areas who don't have access to a union; and the families of current union members – very extended families, based on Maori notions of 'wh?nau' (family). Membership costs NZ$1 per week, roughly 20 per cent of typical union fees.[63]

In addition there are many independent, nationally focused equivalents to the internationally oriented websites already discussed. For example, the Union News website in the UK was established in September 2011. Since then it has produced dozens of short film reports and podcast episodes covering numerous disputes, campaigns and conferences around the country. It provides daily updates from across the spectrum of UK union issues and activity. It has a growing list of social media links, chiefly via Twitter and Facebook, to activists, representatives and officials in the UK union movement.[64]

YouTube and the labour movement

Aware of the powerful impact of film in constructing labour culture historically, in 2004 the MUA established a film unit to emulate in the interactive digital era the exemplary work of its predecessor union's film unit in the 1950s. To recruit talent, it held 'Working Class Idol' competitions with prizes such as scholarships to study film-making and trips to the USA and Cuba to film labour events. Stevedore Jamie McMechan won in 2008 and went on to become the mainstay of the MUA film unit. Lisa Milner describes how an MUA delegation joined other dockworkers from around the world in September 2009 to support their Irish comrades in a long-running dispute with their employers. McMechan shot and quickly posted online a film of this Dublin dockers' dispute. It showed footage of the picket line at the docks and interviews with workers and maritime union leaders.[65] McMechan observed: 'For the first time in history a person with a camera, or even a mobile phone, can have a profound impact on millions of people from around the world almost instantly.' Through filming and uploading onto YouTube, it was in some ways possible, he claimed, to compete with the right-wing, mainstream views of multinational media moguls such as the Rupert Murdochs of this world. Distortion and factually biased content had to be challenged, he insisted.[66]

Lisa Milner's study of this and other union online films stresses that such works stand in contrast to news and current affairs coverage of strikes, which often exclude the voice or viewpoint of rank-and-file workers. Like their historical predecessors, these YouTube films present their witness accounts and histories to produce political assent and collective remembering along solidaristic, emotional lines. 'They engender a mode of social subjectivity through their viewing.'[67] For those filmed, the authentic acts of the unionists telling their stories add to their self-worth and influence their self-identity. Helen Gelston, wife of one of the striking dockers, commented: 'Watching the piece on the site

today reminds me of the bond that he spoke about so often over the years with the lads, young and old. I now see it is portrayed worldwide.' As McMechan points out, unions can use YouTube to post short, sharp, concise reporting of the issues at hand to the largest online video website on the planet.[68]

Recently, YouTube videos played a pivotal role in spreading the Walmart workers' walkouts. Some were produced well in advance, encouraging the mood building up towards militant action. For example, 'Walmart Workers Fighting for Change'/'Trabajadores de Walmart Luchan por el Cambio' by WMTWorkersForChange, uploaded 23 April 2009, stated: 'Help us spread the word about Walmart employees' collective struggle for dignity at work. Check out our new video and tell your friends about Walmart's anti-worker policies.'[69] During the walkouts, individuals and alternative media groups produced an enormous number of YouTube videos, sometimes spontaneously. For example, 'First Wal-Mart strike ever in L.A. 10–5–12' by Ingmar Sciortino, posted 5 October 2012, explained: 'This morning I just happened to pass by first Wal-Mart strike ever. Employees of Wal-mart came from all over the world! I wish I had more time and could have filmed the entire thing.'[70] Much more elaborately, 'Wal-Mart Workers in 12 States Stage Historic Strikes, Protests Again' by democracynow, posted 10 October 2012, described how Walmart workers have launched historic labour protests and strikes across 28 stores in 12 states, the first retail worker strike in the company's 50-year history. It showed how employees are protesting company attempts to silence and victimize workers for speaking out for improvements on the job. Its interviews included one in Bentonville, Arkansas with Mike Compton, a Walmart worker protesting outside the company headquarters just days after taking part in a successful strike at a Walmart supply warehouse in Elwood, Illinois. One of the Responses said: 'Keep pumping the strike on their ass guy.'[71]

Other titles and authors, often revealing in themselves, and with thousands of hits, include: 'Confessions of a Wal-Mart Hit Man' by Brave New Films; 'Why I Hate Wal-Mart' by MrKarmaDude; 'Wake Up Wal-Mart!' by TeamsterPower; 'The Hidden Costs of Walmart' by wuwm; 'Walmart Loves Unions.… Outside the U.S.' by The Young Turks; 'Walmart Sucks!!!' by the underrepresented; 'Wal-Mart Christmas Sweat Shops' by BradWalmart; 'Walmart Workers Speak Out About Abusive Working Conditions' by ALIGNny; 'WalMart.… Pay a Living Wage or Get Out!' by The Big Picture RT; 'Wal-Mart Greedy Walton Family Exposed + Underground Bunker!' by chellow2; 'People "Fighting" at Walmart, Black Friday' by jebusi; 'America Can't Afford Wal-Mart Any Longer' by wuwm; 'Why Walmart Can't Fix the Food System' by ALIGNny; 'The Truth About Walmart – A Worker's Perspective' by Mike Siviwe Elliott; 'Stand with Striking Wal-Mart Workers On Black Friday' by D. Train; 'March & Sit-in to Support the Walmart Warehouse Strikers' by Bob Simpson; 'PRANKSTERS STRIKE WALMART – 101 Ways to Annoy People: Episode 6' by leepingpongpang; 'Wal Mart Workers Strike' by People's World; and many more.[72]

The power of the visual to tell the truth when the powerful behave badly is invaluable in labour struggles. YouTube videos are often used to show what has

really happened on picket lines and protests. For example, on 3 March 2015 hundreds of Delhi Metro Rail Corporation contract workers protested at the Delhi Secretariat to press their demand to be made permanent employees. Authorities refused to meet with the workers. The Delhi police lathi-charged the workers. The brutality was displayed vividly in a 17-second clip.[73]

Trouble in second life: a case of virtual militancy

The world's first virtual strike occurred on 27 September 2007. This was a mass picket held in Second Life (SL) in support of workers at IBM Italy. It was organized by Union Network International (UNI), the Global Union for skills and services, and the Italian union representing IBM workers, Rappresentenza Sindicale Unitaria (RSU).[74] The dispute arose when IBM Italy rejected a claim for a small pay rise, cancelled a performance bonus worth €1,000 and refused to talk to representatives of the 9,000 RSU-organized workers. RSU approached UNI, which covers workers in SL. IBM has been a major investor in SL and, at this time, over 6,000 IBM employees were spending some or all of their work-time in SL.[75]

Publicity for the virtual picket went out in advance through unions and labour portals such as Labour Start. The innovative action, which received considerable media attention, took place over 12 hours to enable supporters across different time zones to take part. There were also real-life pickets outside IBM offices in Italy. RSU and UNI set up a UNI SL area where protesters were advised to report. Materials such as placards were available to identify participants. Avatars provided assistance there and at a number of IBM installations. They carried banners to inform passers-by and suggest they sign the online petition in support of the workers.[76] A blogger enthused: 'This was only one more union campaign of the type that are going on every day around the globe, but the significance of Second Life in the dispute was something totally new.'[77]

The protesters became more numerous. IBM reacted by closing down its Business Center to the public. Anyone trying to enter without a password bounced off an invisible barrier. However, a protester's avatar got into a staff meeting then called in protester friends. Minutes later, 20 avatars crashed the meeting.[78] According to the *Guardian*, workers in SL 'marched and waved banners, gate-crashed a staff meeting and forced the company to close its business center to visitors'. The protest included a rowdy collection of pink triangles, sentient bananas and other bizarro avatars.[79] A blogger reported: 'The poor IBM staff were quite confused and asked us to go protest outside. We, in return, demanded to speak to IBM management to put forward our requests. They ended up cancelling their meeting.' Another blogger described the action like this:

> I don't know about you, but this is my first virtual protest! Surprising to notice how close to RL (Real Life) it really is … no one I meet 'has' a real name, I have no idea if they are all IBM workers, trade unionists or spies, if they are from Canada or India! But they all showed up, speaking many

> languages, demonstrating with the banners. … *Nothing's normal*, except that IBM management hasn't met with us in SL and still hasn't offered a response to our repeated requests for a return to the bargaining table and decent wages and benefits for its Italian workers.[80]

With participants from 30 different countries, 1,849 avatars took part in the SL action. The novelty of the protest secured so much press coverage it pressured IBM. On 24 October the CEO of IBM Italy resigned. Negotiations with the workers resumed and the performance bonuses reinstated, so the aims of the SL action were largely won. UNI organizer Christine Revkin commented: 'The threat of strike action in the "real world" by the Italian unions after the virtual protest has certainly also helped to break the deadlock. Yet the impact of this historical action in Second Life must not be underestimated.'[81] She emphasized that the virtual protest, which had led to new negotiations and the workers securing a better deal, was a case of hard work paying off. While the strike was playful, it was also buttressed by careful planning and organization: worker activists had set up a virtual strike taskforce, developed educational materials in three languages and held more than 20 online worker strategy meetings.[82]

In the aftermath of this virtual strike, organizers launched Union Island on SL, 'a space built to help the labor movement leverage new social networking tools, including how to create avatars, build more dynamic websites, as well swap tricks of the trade over a beer at the virtual bar'.[83] In March 2008 a skybox museum was installed on Union Island to tell the story of the previous year's IBM Protest, which it claimed was crucial in securing a good deal for IBM Italy staff hit by a pay cut and management refusal to negotiate. 'Take a quick trip (you can teleport in from the IBM monument in the north west of Union Island), and find out what happened, and what went on behind the scenes to organize this extraordinary event.' Proud centrepiece of the museum was a friendly robot, an SL recreation of the trophy awarded to the protest team as one of the top 10 Nextxplorateurs of the year. This was for 'projects that had shown exceptional innovation and promise for societal change', presented at the 2008 Forum Netxplorateur, a high level conference in Paris on the social and business impacts of Web 2.0.[84]

Union Island lasted two years. The organizers thanked all the residents, without whom the island would have been less fun, less interactive, less noisy and less beautiful, but closed it down in January 2010. They confessed that the organizations involved were too busy and short of resources to devote enough time to share the running of events or be in to chat to visitors. They recommended other labour movement sites such as Uniglobalunion Oh, Wotcher Tenk, Johninnit Ni, Unionisland Republic; and signed off 'Best wishes and solidarity, virtual-world and real-world.'[85]

Stories like this SL protest point to immense possibilities, but the type of virtual solidarity seen in this IBM strike remains more promise than reality, according to a labour strategies blog.

> People are willing to sign petitions, donate money, trade information and join in political discussions online, but translating these activities into labor solidarity built on trust and a willingness to take economic or physical risk on another's behalf is exceedingly rare.[86]

The challenge of Web 2.0

Unions and worker activists have thoroughly embraced Web 2.0 as an improved technology to aid organization and mobilization and also to experiment with innovative strategies only made possible since its advent. However, as the fate of Union Island illustrates, there is the problem of costs in terms of time and resources associated with Web 2.0. Its interactivity means unions have to respond to user-generated inquiries and monitor online discussions, and failure to do so has negative consequences. For instance, Blackadder criticized Canadian unions for falling behind in their online maintenance work, warning that when unions do not update their new social media sites regularly, people wrongly assume nothing is happening and the union misses an opportunity for networking, mobilizing and educating.[87] Labour organizations are grappling with the issue of how to devote sufficient resources to such activities without detracting from other urgent tasks. There are also serious hazards to consider. The two principal dangers in labour's use of Web 2.0 technology are: its use by employers as a means of surveillance of workers and workers' advocates in particular; and the fact that it can be locked down by service providers or authoritarian governments.[88]

The rise of social media has given employers an extra opportunity to monitor, spy upon and ultimately discipline and control employees. Bosses will be watching and online spaces such as Facebook, which closed down the account of an SEIU affiliate trying to organize casino workers in Nova Scotia, are commercial ventures. During the 2011–2012 BA cabin-crew dispute, when 22 separate strike days were having a real impact, BA management disciplined more than 40 crew in a series of moves aimed at their use of Facebook, email networks and text messages; three of the 18 cases concerned with Facebook postings were to 'friends'. Although the cabin-crew union's electronic forum built solidarity and gave the geographically dispersed membership a sense of common identity against the employer, there were downsides to its use.[89] A BA cabin-crew member involved in the dispute wrote to thank the industrial relations academics who published a letter of support in the *Guardian* 'using a friend's email – we are all living in a climate of fear'.[90] Martin Upchurch argues the self-disciplining effect of the panopticon in the workplace constitutes a serious problem for labour organization and mobilization based on new social media.[91]

These dangers are not insurmountable. Lee advises that social networks are excellent in principle but, given that employers can snoop and something such as Facebook can close down anything it wants, unions need to have their own tools, websites and mail-lists.[92] Considering the Apple/Google duopoly, the problem of privacy and the costs of app development, he urges unions to use the Firefox OS

and open-source software. With Jeremy Green he has provided a handbook for activists to follow this advice.[93]

Unions are also confronting other challenges because of the way in which Web 2.0 is a new digital ball-game. Workers can use social networking to outflank their unions, potentially perhaps dispense with them. While providing invaluable additional benefits for organization and mobilization, the static information portals of the pre-Web 2.0 world protected unions from the possibility of displacement of the traditional union form. Facebook and other online social networking tools such as Twitter and listserves, are, at one level, just a new way for unions to engage in their conventional practices of encouraging workers' solidaristic responses and building collective responses and struggles. However, because of its interactive nature that the earlier internet lacked, social networking technology actually threatens existing unionism at the same time as expanding its scope and reach.

Web 2.0 enables online articulations of rank-and-file discontent with union leadership and direction. Commentators argue Web 2.0 has therefore improved internal union democracy, aiding organization and mobilization, because it has been used by union members within localities, regions and states to dislodge dysfunctional hierarchies.[94] Just as elites in the wider world are concerned that they no longer control completely the gates of information flow, corrupt or conservative union leaders have good reason to fear Web 2.0 technology in the hands of militant working-class activists. Blogs and other new social media are an obvious way in which workers might articulate grievances not only against their employers but also against their union bosses. Well short of displacement of real-world unionism, Web 2.0 technology facilitates internal challenges to union leaderships, should these be misrepresenting workers.

However, it would be unwise to imagine that only militant activists would use social media to obstruct the dead hand of complacent union bureaucracies by spreading information and challenging official discourse. Social media could also be used to undermine solidarity, to spread suspicion and disaffection during industrial disputes. As Martin Upchurch argues, it is just as likely that union bureaucracies or right-wing activists will utilize such networks; and, ability to challenge union hierarchies or change policy direction will still rest with winning the majority argument in collective open debate.[95]

Some labour strategists maintain that unions need to learn from the success and popularity of online social networking by applying to union activities the *attributes* of online social networking rather than simply the technology. For example, Facebook: is simple to use and cheap to acquire; has a common platform that can be tailored by individuals or groups; has low to non-existent costs; has a 'use-as-you-go' system appealing to new adopters unsure of benefits and with fears of lock-in; has strong network externalities whereby the greater the user base the greater are the individual benefits. Alex Bryson and others, starting from the premise that the benefits of unionism are not easily discerned until after joining a union, argue unions can learn how to market their hard-to-observe benefits by studying and appropriating techniques from contemporary

membership-based institutions such as Facebook and other successful online networking communities. They offer no precise model of unionism, which borrows from the success of Facebook-style social networks; they merely indicate a direction in which unions need to look in the hope of attracting millions of new members.[96]

Web 2.0 technology also facilitates interaction between labour movements and other radical movements, to the potential benefit of both. New social media allows unions to 'follow' or 'befriend' other progressive allies; commenting on their stories, retweeting or sharing their posts, and tagging them in photos or relevant new stories provides a meaningful connection.[97] In the final analysis, internet-enabled linkages between labour and other social movements can help bring the power of workers at the point of production to bear on contemporary struggles; and remind other progressive activists of the effectiveness of strike action to achieve not just better wages and conditions but broader social goals.

Since withdrawal of labour remains the principal way in which workers defend or improve their circumstances, the contribution of Web 2.0 to aiding such activity is the crucial question. At the Web 2.0 extreme of industrial formation, a literally virtual union or union movement, existing only in cyberspace and with minimal membership fees, offers a labourist equivalent to Facebook. The issue here would be what might be lost should Facebook-style cyberunionism replace traditional unionism. Can truly solidaristic bonds between workers be forged online? Could focus on cybercollectivity undermine immediate and urgent tasks in workplaces? The sensible approach, according to GLS, is systematic integration of old and new technologies, so cheap and fast Facebook or Twitter campaigns never entirely replace the real human contact required to build lasting and deep solidarity.[98]

Todd Wolfson argues that, in the era of Fordist capitalism, revolutionary movements formed large centralized party-like formations that mirrored Fordism's economies of scale. Correspondingly, in the contemporary moment of informational capitalism, activists forge nimble, networked formations as a facsimile of the networked society they inhabit. Yet he stresses that the most successful movements are still driven by face-to-face relationships, trust, analysis, a strong understanding of local concerns, leadership development and on-the-ground organizing. He presents a compelling case for the powerful combination of network-based activism with older traditions of struggle such as those of labour movements with an emphasis on the working class.[99] Workplaces matter, especially in the developing world where industrial production is increasingly located, to which we now turn.

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4 Subverting the shift in production

> The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world-market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country.… In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations.… The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication … compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production … it creates a world after its own image.
>
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New sites of working-class formation

In the past four decades, there has been a huge shift in the patterns of global production as transnational corporations engage in global 'labour arbitrage' on a grand scale, offshoring whole operations and outsourcing partial ones to developing countries. The reasons are obvious. In 2008 Chinese manufacturing workers were paid US$1.36 an hour on average, equivalent to 4 per cent of the rate for comparable work in the USA and 3 per cent in the European Union (EU). Areas of Asia, such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Bangladesh, have lower wages than China. This encourages a divide-and-rule tendency for corporations to locate some sectors of production, such as light industrial textile production, in these still lower wage countries. In 2010 garment workers in Bangladesh earned around US$64 a month, compared to minimum wages in China's coastal industrial provinces ranging from US$117 to US$147 a month.[1]

There was also gigantic expansion of market production in former Eastern bloc countries in the 1990s – 'probably the greatest expansion of the world market in history', according to William Jefferies.[2] By the early 2000s Eastern Europe had adopted the free-market underpinnings of its Western counterpart.[3] Transnational corporations have also increased their operations in South America and Africa. The acronym BRICS – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa – is used to describe those emerging industrial powerhouses, which produced 20 per cent of gross world product in 2013.[4] ILO figures indicate the proportion of industrial employment located in developing countries rose from 51 per cent in

1980 to 73 per cent in 2008, when 40 per cent of the global labour force was located in China and India alone.[5] Between 1980 and 2005 the labour force in the Middle East and North Africa grew by 149 per cent; in sub-Saharan Africa, South America and the Caribbean it doubled; in south Asia it increased by 73 per cent; and in east and south-east Asia by 60 per cent.[6]

A vast low-wage workforce has been tapped. Women have been enticed into paid work in huge numbers in developing countries. Feminist scholars argue this new source of paid labour is as important as any other element that makes the shift to developing countries so attractive to corporations.[7] Peasants have been driven off their land by agribusiness and coercive neoliberal policies, creating a huge supply of landless labourers in the expanding metropolises for secondary and tertiary employment. A Christian Aid worker described the situation on the ground in Ghana in 2004. 'As a condition of its loans, it has to follow IMF rules for "structural adjustment". What this usually means is removing subsidies from local agriculture or industry, and opening up its market and privatizing.' Local farmer Kofi Eliasa tells his story. Under IMF rules the Ghanaian government removed support for a nearby tomato-processing factory and opened up the local market to imports. A glut of cheap tomato paste from Europe, where the industry is supported by subsidies, put Ghanaian farmers out of work. 'I used to have a one-acre tomato farm but I couldn't feed my family.' So Eliasa was labouring 12 hours a day, breaking rocks in a quarry.[8]

The impact of a coercive free-trade policy on Mexican workers and peasants was brought dramatically to international attention by the Zapatista rebellion that commenced on 1 January 1994, the day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into force. NAFTA banned subsidies to indigenous farm cooperatives. The Zapatistas declared 'Ya Basta!' ('Enough is enough') and took control of areas of Chiapas, demanding indigenous rights and workers' rights. Millions of Mexicans work for starvation wages under precarious conditions for transnational corporations in export processing zones (EPZs) established from the 1980s, where unions are prohibited or severely restricted.[9] Now common in other parts of the world, the Mexican EPZs or maquiladoras – predominantly textiles and automobiles and subsequently electronics – paved the way for transnational capitalism to expand such lucrative operations to other countries.

In 2013 6,300 maquiladoras throughout Mexico employed 2.3 million people, almost 90 per cent of them working on assembly lines. Corporations enjoy low wages, duty-free imports of raw and semi-finished materials, low energy costs, government tax breaks, availability of both skilled and unskilled labour and a very well organized ruling class that has brutally weakened union opposition. Employers are free to associate in the powerful Asociación de Maquiladoras to ensure wages remain low at each and every factory. The basic monthly pay for manufacturing workers is around €100, with the legal minimum wage about €4 for an eight-hour day.[10] One of the 22,000 workers in a Foxconn factory in Ciudad Juarez on the Mexico-US border told reporters in January 2015 that wages had stayed the same for at least three years.

> For two years our bosses have been telling us we'll get a rise but nothing ever changes.… Some of our bosses are real bullies, including the office staff. They always give you a hard time if you don't stay late and work overtime, which is actually compulsory.[11]

In China in three decades from the early 1980s, 150 million workers migrated from rural to urban areas.[12] China now stands at the centre of the global manufacturing system, and contains the largest working class in capitalism's history.[13] Proletarianized working classes may, for the first time, become the majority of the world's population; world-historical conditions, according to Minqi Li, are finally approaching the circumstances Marx envisaged as leading to the downfall of the bourgeoisie.[14] China's rapid capital accumulation has been based on the ruthless exploitation of hundreds of millions of workers. From 1990 to 2005, China's labour income, as a share of GDP, fell from 50 to 37 per cent. In addition to low wage-rates, transnational corporations have been relatively unrestrained in the working conditions offered Chinese employees, given the absence of effective independent trade unions, as the case study below reveals. Working conditions are often dirty, demeaning and demanding, and also dangerous. Some 200 million Chinese are said to work in hazardous conditions, claiming over a 100,000 lives a year.[15]

While Chinese workers are hyper-exploited by transnational corporations, Chinese capital offers a similar deal to workers elsewhere, notably in Africa and Eastern Europe. Ching Kwan Lee has compared the operations of Chinese state capital and global private capital as exploiters of labour. In Zambia, for example, they offer different bargains to copper miners: 'stable exploitation' in the form of secure employment at low wages; or 'flexible exclusion', that is, precarious employment at higher wages. A labour regime predicated on low-wage exploitation is no better than one driven by casualization and retrenchment, because both entail permanent precarity. The influx of foreign investment and growth figures that inspire the rhetoric of 'rising' Africa coexist incongruously with increasing insecurity in employment and livelihood. Despite the rise in global copper prices, most mining communities witness pervasive poverty; aggregate economic growth has not brought better livelihoods for people.[16]

The impression conveyed in mainstream media is that workers are prospering in developing countries that have experienced dramatic growth. Workers have told different stories, for example, the blog from Gurgaon, a satellite town south of Delhi, which became the symbol of 'Shining India'. It reveals the vulnerability of these workers to the vagaries of global markets and their continuing dependence on the villages from whence they have come to sell their labour to global capitalists.[17] India, with a huge supply of English-speaking educated labour is home to thousands of call-centres. Although white-collar workers such as those in call-centres have higher status than manufacturing workers, they work in factory-like settings and are subjected to highly precarious employment and harsh working conditions.[18] According to *Gurgaon Workers News*: 'Thousands of young middle class people lose time, energy and academic aspirations

on night-shifts in call centres, selling loan schemes to working-class people in the US or pre-paid electricity schemes to the poor in the UK.'[19] In India as a whole, working-class discontent simmers. On 2 September 2015 the largest strike in world history occurred when 150 million Indian workers withdrew labour to protest government attacks on wages and workers' rights.[20]

Under the global manufacturing system, transnational corporations structure and preside over an international wage hierarchy. Selwyn calls this 'hyper-babbagisation', a reference to early nineteenth-century economist Charles Babbage who argued that the division of labour could lead to both general productivity increases and wage-cost reductions. Selwyn describes hyper-babbagisation as a process designed to fragment and raise the rate of exploitation of labour through a geographically dispersed subdivision of the labour process, which also enables transnational corporations to attack workers' wages in core economies. Hyper-babbagisation cuts production costs, divides the workforce along numerous lines and intensifies exploitation of labour across the global commodity chain as a whole. 'One consequence of this strategy is that the expansion of the global labouring class over the last four decades has been one based on impoverishment.'[21] David Bacon, a union organizer for 20 years in the USA and Mexico, describes how he learnt first hand how the changes brought about by globalization are experienced not at the top of the economy but at the bottom:

> People who can't make a living as coffee farmers in Veracruz become farm laborers picking grapes in Delano, or die crossing the border's Desierto del Diablo in the attempt. Mexican workers won a nineteen-month strike at Watsonville, California, frozen food plant, only to see other Mexicans hired to fill their jobs a few years later, when the company moves production a thousand miles south to Irapuato.[22]

Where capital goes, labour-capital conflict follows

As Beverly Silver has persuasively shown, the labour movement is weakened in sites of disinvestment but ultimately strengthened in sites of expansion. Working classes are created or consolidated in the favoured new investment areas. Where capital goes, labour-capital conflict follows. For instance, automobile corporations have been chasing cheap and disciplined labour around the world, only to find themselves continuously recreating militant labour movements in the new locations. She concludes that the impact of the relocation of industrial capital to low-wage areas has been less unidirectional than the race-to-the-bottom thesis suggests.[23]

The cheap labour economic 'miracles' of the 1970s and 1980s – such as Brazil, South Africa and South Korea – each created new, strategically located working classes, which in turn produced powerful new labour movements rooted in expanding mass production industries, which were successful in improving wages and working conditions.[24] Gay Seidman's aptly titled *Manufacturing*

Militance tells the story of workers' movements in Brazil and South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s.[25] Likewise, Hagen Koo's study of Korean workers describes the culture and politics of working-class formation in the final decades of the twentieth century.[26] Labour militancy in South Korea, South Africa and Brazil, as in other parts of South America, has developed and deepened further in the new century.[27] 'Labour in South Africa has never been stronger', claimed Eddie Webster in November 2006.[28]

Where the ability of workers to combine is outlawed or severely restricted there are predictably fewer gains. However, even in the maquiladoras of Mexico there was some success. For example, strikes at the Duro plant in Rio Bravo in 2000 and the Kukdong factory in Puebla in 2001 achieved significant improvements in wages and conditions.[29] Unfortunately, circumstances again deteriorated for maquiladora workers after the election of the extreme right-wing Calderon government. This pro-business National Action Party regime 2006–2012 clamped down heavily on unions, even driving the leader of the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union into exile and attempting to destroy the Mexican Electrical Workers Union by liquidating the Mexican Light and Power Company and firing 44,000 workers. Dozens of workers' rights activists lost their lives. Unions were weakened and second-generation maquiladoras consolidated between 2006 and 2012.[30]

In October 2013 union density had fallen from 10.6 to 8.8 per cent, and few unions could be considered really independent. The cautious Congress of Labor and the Confederation of Mexican Workers, loyal to the authoritarian and corrupt Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) government, dominate the labour movement while the more independent National Union of Workers (UNT) is comparatively weak. Yet the struggle continues, with an Authentic Labor Front within the UNT offering proposals for a more democratic union movement and a more democratic society; and a promising New Labor Central formed in February 2014 under the leadership of the militant Mexican Electrical Workers Union and the National Coordinating Committee of the Teachers Union. Workers have not been willing to accept that corporations may keep factories free from unions. Battle, according to well-placed observers, may once again be about to recommence.[31] Richard Roman and Edur Velasco Arregui insist Mexican workers, radically different from their American counterparts, retain 'strong revolutionary traditions'. The Mexican regime has become destabilized by decades of economic restructuring and Mexican workers are exploited and repressed; but they are not simply victims and might be neoliberalism's gravediggers.[32]

In March 2015, for example, thousands of farmworkers in the San Quintín Valley struck some 230 farms at the peak of the harvest, demanding higher wages and other benefits. Disrupting picking, packing and shipping of fruit and vegetables to the USA, they succeeded within three days in negotiating an agreement giving them the right to create their own union, instead of remaining with the Confederation of Mexican Workers and the Regional Confederation of Workers of Mexico, affiliated with the PRI and which had colluded with employers to keep wages low. The Alliance of National, State, and Municipal Organizations

for Social Justice organized the general strike in the valley's fields, created roadblocks and burnt tyres along 120 kilometres of highway to stop delivery of produce to US markets, and occupied government buildings and a police station. The influence of female workers is apparent amongst the 14 demands made: 'Maternity leave for six weeks during pregnancy and for another six weeks after birth'; 'Five days of paid paternity leave for men'; and 'Measures against sexual assault by "foremen" or "engineers".'[33]

Silver's premise that where capital goes, labour unrest follows, naturally directs attention to subsequent 'cheap labour economic miracles'. An underlying argument of *Forces of Labor* was that we should have our eyes open for the emergence of new sites, protagonists and forms of labour unrest as new working classes and workers' movements are made. Her World Labour Group predicted from analysis of the historical pattern described in *Forces of Labor* that by the first decade of the twenty-first century, we would see strong new labour movements emerging in the sites to which manufacturing capital had been moving massively in the 1990s, most notably China.[34]

China: an emergent centre of labour militancy

China is becoming the 'epicentre of global labour unrest', according to Silver and Zhang.[35] Chris King-Chi Chan's study of migrant workers' strikes in China's Pearl River Delta 1978–2010 explicitly concurs, demonstrating with case studies of collective actions that workers' class consciousness and strategies toward class organization have steadily advanced in the process of China's integration into the global economy and escalation of foreign direct investment since joining the WTO in 2001. Over the next decade, Chinese workers' strikes posed significant challenges to global capital and influenced labour regulations and policies, resulting in a wave of labour legislation. Strikers also exhibited rising awareness of trade unions as a channel for articulating class interests.[36] Chi-Jou Jay Chen, who documents the increase in strikes 2000–2012, describes the years 2005–2006 as an important turning point, leading over the next few years to pluralization of protests, a broadening of the occupational groups of workers involved and increased rates of participation in industrial protests.[37]

Spontaneous strikes became common, also hidden slow-downs and strikes organized secretly beforehand, all signs of increasing self-activity of a working class.[38] Another feature of Chinese industrial militancy is workers protesting away from the factory to pressure local authorities often responsible for issues such as minimum wage-rates. For example, in 2006, factory workers organized a highway blockade after finding vermin in canteen meals. The blockade was successful: not only did food hygiene improve, so too did the daily wage rate.[39]

The growing organization of workers is aided by demographic factors. China's total working-age population was expected to peak at 970 million in 2012 then decline to about 940 million by 2020. Minqi Li notes that the massive reserve army of cheap labour in China's rural areas is becoming depleted, increasing young workers' bargaining power and encouraging them to develop

more permanent workers' organizations.[40] Elaine Sio-ieng Hui and Chris King-chi Chan agree that stronger marketplace bargaining power has emboldened migrant workers to take offensive actions at the workplace level to advance their interests, in addition to local governments increasing legal minimum wage rates to cope with labour shortage.[41] In 2010 *The Economist* noted that Chinese workers had won significant pay increases through industrial organization and militancy. 'Firms may have to get used to bolshier workers. The number of young adults is set to shrink, which is likely to make China's factory boys and girls harder to please.'[42]

The situation of Chinese workers subjected to extraordinary pressures to work overtime was brought to international attention with a series of worker suicides at Taiwanese-owned Foxconn's massive Shenzhen factory complex. The largest private employer in China, Foxconn employs 1.4 million workers there and produces a huge share of the world's electronics, such as Apple iPhones and iPads. In the first five months of 2010, 12 of its employees, all aged 18–24, killed themselves, mostly by jumping from the huge multi-storey dormitories workers inhabit during their precious few hours off work. Foxconn keeps a tight lid on publicity, with mainstream Chinese media under its grip, so news does not easily leak out, but it is clear that suicides among its workforce have continued, despite the anti-suicide nets installed on its buildings. The All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), never distinguished for its independent advocacy for workers, took the unusual step on 2 February 2015 of publicly criticizing Foxconn for excessive overtime regimes and low base wages. Foxconn allegedly evades labour law regulations by instructing workers not to punch in to work on Sundays while secretly compensating excessive overtime in the form of bonuses.[43]

Jenny Chan has conducted fieldwork amongst workers at Foxconn and has written extensively about China's new working class. She points to the possibility of cooperation between Foxconn workers and global consumer groups using Apple products to confront Apple, ultimately responsible for the long working hours, low wages and terrible working conditions of Foxconn workers. If suicide is understood as one extreme form of labour protest chosen by some to expose injustice, she also shows how many more Chinese workers are choosing other courses, engaging in a crescendo of individual and collective struggles to define their rights and defend their dignity in the face of combined corporate and state power.[44]

Not just individual desperation but the collective resistance of an emergent Chinese working class was displayed May–July 2010 in a wave of strikes, predominantly in the industrial manufacturing hub in Guangdong's Pearl River Delta. These were unprecedented in their proliferation. Officially reported strikes in about 25 factories were widely covered in Chinese and international media, but unofficial statements from the Guangzhou Federation of Trade Unions indicate more than 100 strikes occurred in Guangdong province alone. In most cases, the strikes led to substantial wage increases for the workers. The second generation of migrant workers from the interior provinces of China is refusing to accept

the hyper-exploitation of labour still characteristic of a great number of Chinese industries.[45]

Zhang's study of the auto workers' strikes that were an important component in the 2010 strike wave argues the strikers' success demonstrates the growing bargaining power and consciousness of the younger generation of Chinese workers. She compares the situation with the experience of auto workers in the USA in the early twentieth century and in Western Europe in the 1950s and 1960s: the first generation migrating to work in the plants generally did not protest the harsh conditions; but the second generation became the backbone of militant struggles. Chinese auto workers are following this pattern, now demonstrating their willingness, determination and capacity to mobilize collectively.[46] The militancy displayed in the 2010 strikes, according to Florian Butollo, constitutes a step in the process of class formation of a hitherto fragmented and atomized working class, which changes the balance of forces in Chinese society and spurs reforms towards institutionalization of capital-labour conflict.[47]

The 2010 strike wave raised demands for the reorganization of workplace-based unions, confronting the reluctance of the ACFTU to protect workers' interests due to its proximity to the Communist Party-run state and local authorities, which tend to favour corporate interests. At the Honda Nanhai parts factory where the strike wave commenced, the district government sent district-level union officials to assault workers on 31 May, hospitalizing four young workers. One of the strikers complained on the internet:

> at this critical moment our great trade union did nothing for us. Instead they just wanted us to go back to the production line! Is this what a union should be doing? You take from our monthly wages five yuan for union dues but look what you have done for us!

In an unprecedented move, the district union sent an open letter of apology to the workers, admitting some of its methods might have been 'misunderstood as siding with management'.[48] In an open letter in reply, workers' representatives condemned the branch trade union for attacking them and encouraging workers to return to work: 'We insist that the branch trade union of the factory shall be elected by the production line workers.'[49] However, at Honda Nanhai, as elsewhere, such rights have been more difficult to achieve than wage increases. On the other hand, the workplace union at Honda Nanhai did negotiate a further wage increase in March 2011 as a result of collective bargaining with management.[50]

'Battle Reports' from strike experiences in 2010 and 2011 were written down as oral history from interviews with industrial activists. This collection illustrates the growing class consciousness of Chinese workers, especially younger ones, including teenagers. It contributes further to that process, for these reports have been circulating in China since 2011 as samizdat literature.[51] They tell the story of a working class becoming present at its own making.

At Foxconn strikes have also occurred since the suicide wave, for instance, in October 2012 3,000–4,000 workers stopped work in protest against being made

to work on a national public holiday and against overly strict product quality demands without necessary training. Quality-control inspectors joined the strike, despite some of them having been beaten up by outraged workers.[52]

By 2013 factory wages had increased by 50 per cent since the 2010 strike wave, but employers responded by cutting overtime and bonuses, increasing wage deductions for food and accommodation, and increasing use of temporary agency work and limited work contracts – to be able to react to fluctuations in demand and divide the workforce.[53] Industrial militancy naturally persists. According to 'friends of gongchao': 'Struggles are usually about economic demands, but also the unfulfilled expectations, the daily drudgery, the injustice and degradation. Strikes and other forms of resistance have been more widely accepted, not just among migrant workers, since the strike wave in 2010.'[54]

In the biggest single migrant worker strike yet to affect a foreign-owned company, in April 2014 around 50,000 of the 60,000 workers from the six Yue Yuen shoe factories in Dongguan, an industrial city between Shenzhen and Guangzhou, went on strike. Run by the Taiwan-based Pou Chen Group, Yue Yuen is one of the world's biggest contract manufacturers for shoes, with 400,000 employees in factories in China, Indonesia and Vietnam producing for more than 30 brands, including Nike, Adidas and Reebok. About 70 per cent of the Dongguan Yue Yuen workers are women, many of whom have worked there for more than five years. Discontent with low wages had been building for some time; the strike broke out when workers discovered the company had not been paying the full social insurance contributions required for retired workers to get full pensions.[55] However, social security problems were just the trigger, according to a veteran worker: 'workers just took this opportunity to vent their anger. Long-term grudges.'[56] Another worker, a 46-year-old woman from Hunan, stated: 'They thought we would be easy to pick on, we are here to prove them wrong.'[57]

The confrontation began with hundreds of workers blocking a bridge in the city on 5 April. When the company failed to respond, the strike began in several factories on 14 April and spread to the others the following day. On 18 April 2,000 workers from another Yue Yuen factory in Jiangxi province joined the strike. The company offered concessions rejected by the strikers as inadequate, but, with riot police arresting workers who continued to strike, by 28 April two-thirds had returned to work.[58] 'Although we returned to work', the veteran worker explained,

> we still harbor resentment. We all feel aggrieved today. Outwardly, the strike has been resolved but the underlying problems are still there. All in all, we are frustrated. We feel especially dissatisfied because of the government's suppression of workers. All of us feel very angry at being forced to work now.

This worker added that, in the early stages of the strike, workers even hoped the government could help mediate in the dispute but that they then saw the

government's true colors when the union's intervention intensified the suppression. 'They are the hatchet men and running dogs of the employer. The fire was put out but the embers remain and it will ignite again. And in the next strike we will definitely be better organized and combat-ready!' Workers were particularly incensed by actions of the municipal union federation, which promised to help them but ended up, in their eyes, acting as an agent for the government and the employer. As the veteran worker said, the union's actions only made the situation worse.[59]

The number of strikes and worker protests recorded on the *China Labour Bulletin* Strike Map doubled in the third quarter of 2014 (372 incidents) compared with the same quarter of 2013 (185 incidents). The Strike Map also indicates that strike action is spreading both geographically and across industrial sectors, with the biggest increase occurring in the construction industry. The number of strikes in the traditional centre of worker activism in Guangdong remains about the same, but its share of the national total declined from 34.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2013 compared to 19.1 per cent in the same quarter of 2014 due to a much more even distribution of strikes across the country.[60] The aims of protesting workers have also changed and multiplied in recent years. Their struggle is not just about wage increases and improved working conditions but job security in the face of closures and relocation, and social insurance, for workers are much more aware of employer evasion of their payment contributions since the Yue Yuen factory strikes in April 2014.[61]

Struggles continue to multiply and diversify. For example, during September–November 2014 there were at least 30 strikes and protests by teachers, mostly in smaller provincial cities and poorer inland areas of China, each involving up to 20,000 teachers complaining about low pay, wages in arrears, pension irregularities and attempts to introduce punitive performance-based pay systems. In the past, teachers have been reluctant to take strike action because of adverse effects on students. The recent increase in teachers' strikes reflects increasing desperation over stagnant wages and uncertainty about pensions. Moreover, according to *China Labour Bulletin*, teachers have been emboldened by the actions of others in the same position and a realization that collective action can be effective.[62]

In February 2015 more than 3,000 workers at a Hangzhou-based H3C Technologies factory, a Hewlett-Packard subsidiary, went on strike against plans to restructure, demanding the reinstatement of fired strike leader Wang Wei and that elected representatives be able to bargain on their behalf.[63] The 'friends of gongchao' stress the significance of recent strikes in giving workers the chance to recognize that their problems are also the problems of many other workers: 'The experience of struggle can take them out of their isolation, competition, and social misery and offer them ways to take collective action.' They describe how this process has become very apparent in China in the past few years: 'Strike experiences circulate, strike tactics are evaluated, collective strategies are tested, activists emerge and send out signals for solidarity actions. The realization that work stoppages can force concessions and enable workers to escape the rat race for hours or days spreads.'[64]

In the Delhi industrial belt: the case of Gurgaon

The Delhi industrial belt, like China's Pearl River Delta, has become a focal point of working-class formation and composition. In 1989 Gurgaon in Haryana near Delhi was a small city of 12,500 but now has 1,500,000 of whom 300,000 are industrial workers, employed in giant factories in automobiles, electronics and telecommunications, IT, food processing, pharmaceutical manufacturing, call-centres and more. Since 2010 Gurgaon has been linked to Delhi by rail. Manesar, a subdivision of Gurgaon, is a new town of 200,000 inhabitants – an Industrial Model Township (IMT), one of six investment regions in the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor. Gurgaon is portrayed in the mainstream media as a symbol of capitalist success. In reality, affluence and poverty unfold side by side, amongst high-rise towers for middle-class professionals and hovels for workers.[65]

In Gurgaon, many people are dazzled by the shopping-malls and corporate towers and cannot see the development of a massive industrial working class. Hundreds of thousands of migrant garment workers labour next to the assembly lines of India's biggest automobile hub and thousands of young workers sweating under the head-sets of Gurgaon's call-centres.[66] A blog from Gurgaon muses how the collective workforce exists beyond factory walls, along supply chains, in backyard living quarters, in remote villages. It is shaped by local, regional and global divisions of labour. Assembly plants around the world depend on parts manufactured in Gurgaon. Production in the huge garment factories is supplied via supervisor-middlemen with piece-work from working women stitching 'at home'. Most employees are migrant workers, moving back and forth between urban industrial life and village. 'Wages are too low to reproduce a nuclear family in Gurgaon, most workers leave their family in the villages.' The village also functions as social insurance, because wages are too low to survive unemployment or illness. 'Workers arrive in Gurgaon with hopes, which are in most cases disillusioned.' Their desires to not be a worker anymore are expressed in plans to open a shop back home.[67]

Employers are ruthless, according to this blog. In winter 2000–2001 Maruti Suzuki used a minor labour dispute to lock out the permanent workforce and replace them through compulsory 'Voluntary Retirement Schemes' with temporary workers. This has been repeated in other companies to a point where 70 to 80 per cent of the average factory workforce is nowadays hired through contractors. Even permanent workers are often young and have less security and lower wages than the older permanent workforce. In the garment factories skilled tailors on piece-rates producing 'full-piece' garments are increasingly put under pressure by chain-systems employing 20 less skilled workers to produce the same garment by machines. Given this complex picture the majority of workers do not face a single boss but many bosses, who hire local 'goons' as a repressive front ready to quell expressions of workers' unrest.[68]

The blog emphasizes the precarity of the Gurgaon workforce in a globalized economy. In spring 2008 the rupee reached a currency peak, causing bad export

conditions. The garment industry in Gurgaon dismissed thousands of workers and shifted orders to 'low currency' countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh. In autumn the rupee plummeted, but so too did the US and European stock markets, sending shock waves into the industrial areas of Gurgaon: credit crunch for real estate, falling garment orders, collapsing US-banking services. The blog reveals the potential for significant working-class composition. It concludes that workers who might otherwise have thought they had little in common but chai stalls – English-speaking call-centre night-shift youth, migrant garment and construction workers and young skilled workers in car-parts plants – now faced the same situation: cuts in bonuses or piece-rates, cancellation of free company meals or transport and threat of job cuts.[69] On the corporate side of the ledger, Maruti Suzuki, market leader in India in the passenger vehicle segment in the late 1980s with 82 per cent of market share, has been reduced through intense competition to 45 per cent of market share in 2008 and to 39 per cent by 2012.[70]

Precarious employment and low wages are common in all these industrial zones.[71] Maruti Suzuki workers became part of the wave of workers' struggles that erupted from 2005. To varying degrees, permanent and temporary workers united to form trade unions and demand the right to collective bargaining. At Maruti Suzuki workers struggled especially hard to try to end the contract labour system.[72] Though Indian labour laws ostensibly forbid the engagement of temporary workers to perform 'perennial' tasks, the proportion of workers employed on this basis is nonetheless increasing exponentially with recent changes to the laws making it easier for employers to increase use of short-term contract labour, often hired via labour-hire companies rather than directly by the major employer. Employers in the Gurgaon region foster divisions between permanent and temporary (contract and casual) workers. Frequently, segmentation between them is intensified by older divisions based on gender, ethnicity and caste.[73]

Maruti Suzuki management encourages workforce disunity at its Manesar plant, made up of around 1,000 permanent workers, 800 apprentices, 400 trainees and 1,200 temporary workers.[74] Permanents are encouraged to despise temporary workers, to fear them as strikebreakers and even call them 'randis' (prostitutes). A field report from June 2012 quoted an astute permanent worker speaking about the managerial divide-and-rule strategy:

> There is a clear policy to divide permanents from temporary workers. Supervisors don't put any pressure on permanents, you can do your job, you can walk around. Pressure is solely on temporary workers. These workers obviously complain, but they don't complain in front of the supervisor, they express their anger towards the permanent workers – they in turn tell the temporary workers to shut up and work.[75]

A materials manager interviewed in 2012 expressed sadistic attitudes toward temporary workers and apprentices: 'keep them always hungry, they will do the work for you … they are born to work, and nothing else'.[76] The temporary workers interviewed in 2012 worked on average 16 hours a day, with perennial

compulsory overtime. They bring their own food or eat the permanent workers' leftover food, like hungry dogs. They face a high incidence of injuries and accidents due to too much pressure and lack of rest. When accidents occur, contractors are told to take away the injured workers and other workers are asked to clean the blood from the machines, which keep running. Disciplinary action is taken against workers who go to the toilet without permission, which has led to renal and urological problems for many workers. 'When I first began working for Maruti', one worker stated, 'assembly lines used to run right through my dreams. These days I suppose I'm so tired that I don't have dreams anymore.'[77]

In 2011 there was serious industrial conflict at Maruti Suzuki that saw permanent and temporary workers initially at odds with each other, but which eventually challenged the 'divisive mechanisms of the managements in the area', according to a report in *Kafila*.[78] This 2011 struggle of Maruti Suzuki workers at Manesar to register their own union in opposition to the company one was spearheaded by young workers, mostly temporaries, and involved factory occupations and strikes without the legally required 'adequate' notice. They went beyond the sanctioned path of state-regulated industrial action, so posed a serious threat to employers and the state. The company responded with intimidation, harassment, dismissals, suspensions, punitive disciplinary measures and lock-out; and state and local authorities with extreme coercion.[79]

When temporary workers reported for duty on 3 October, an agreement having been reached on 30 September between striking workers and Maruti Suzuki, they were turned away and 'goons' hired by management attacked those who gathered at the plant gate and union office-bearers who intervened. All major Indian unions, cutting across party lines, accused Maruti Suzuki management of 'high-handed provocative activities' and stated that preventing resumption of work was 'an absolute act of vengeance' and a blatant breach of the agreement reached.[80] Arup Kumar Sen argues this struggle was a landmark event in the history of the Indian labour movement that strengthened it through 'ripple and solidarity effects'.[81]

Although conditions improved slightly after 2011, conflict erupted again in 2012. Anger at the Manesar plant was building up over management's refusal to recognize an elected union; workers were increasingly frustrated over their inability to exercise their constitutional rights and the demand of equal pay for equal work falling on deaf years. Workers and union leaders were united in their demand that the long-term settlement under negotiation should be implemented for all temporary workers who worked alongside permanents. Management was adamant it would not agree to this. It used the same argument, proffered time and again in this industrial belt by management and the labour department, that permanent workers do not have the legal right to espouse the cause of temporary workers; and that temporary workers do not have the legal right to raise an industrial dispute with the principal employer. It was well-known that these temporary workers were working in core production processes in violation of the Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act 1970, yet no company in Haryana had been prosecuted for this violation. The Haryana Government was not

complying with its statutory duty of constituting a State Contract Labour Advisory Board before which complaints can be raised, investigated and redressed. It was evident from their stand taken during negotiations that the permanent workers of Maruti Suzuki were determined to redress the injustice being meted out to their more precariously employed fellow-workers in the name of business exigency and flexibility.[82]

In April 2012 the union submitted a Charter of Demands to management but, according to a union statement, management did its utmost 'to derail the process and break … the spirit of unity of the workers and the legitimacy of the Union'. As part of this 'vindictive attitude' and 'in a pre-planned manner', on 18 July a supervisor 'abused and made casteist comments against a dalit worker', Jiya Lal, which was 'legitimately protested by the worker'. Instead of taking action against the supervisor as demanded by the union, management suspended Jiya Lal without any investigation then called in armed bouncers, who 'brutally attacked the workers with sharp weapons and arms', hospitalizing several with serious injuries.[83] During the showdown between workers and bouncers an HR manager was killed. Workers interviewed were unanimous that this should not have happened. The union pointed out its history of conducting non-violent struggle despite exasperation with management's disrespect towards their elected union; and their adherence to all preconditions required by management so it would allow the Haryana Labour Department to register the union. Local union leader Rakhi Sehgal explains: 'Unfortunately, the formation and registration of a union does not automatically lead to its recognition by managements, many of which refuse to negotiate in good faith, if at all, with registered unions – a cause of much frustration among workers.' There was 'relentless baying for the blood of workers'.[84]

State authorities arrested hundreds of workers not even involved in the incident and tortured them under interrogation: they were stripped naked and beaten, and injured in the groin as their legs were stretched apart beyond capacity for sustained periods of time.[85] In response to the many voices justifying the retribution by highlighting the workers' 'supposed hotheadedness and impatience', Sehgal commented:

> We must recognise and find the collective will to address issues at the centre of the ongoing dispute between workers and management of Maruti Suzuki – the right to form a union (along with the right to affiliate with any central trade union if they choose to) and the right to equal wages and benefits for equal work and an end to discriminatory wage systems and wage theft. These workers have shown the courage to stand up to a powerful corporation and the might of the State. They are not willing to give up their right to form an autonomous union that the management cannot control or dictate to and they are unwilling to sell out their casual and contract workers by accepting a settlement that does not apply equally to all workers doing the same work. This is the biggest threat to the extant production system.[86]

The report in *Kafila* reflecting on this epic 2012 Maruti Suzuki struggle claims employers are 'constantly plotting to further the segmentation between the permanent and contract workers'.[87] However, workers on the ground continue to bridge such divisions. Early in 2014 the 150 permanent and 310 temporary workers at ASTI Electronics united to establish the right to form a union, with temporary and permanent workers contributing 1,500 and 5,000 rupees respectively for this cause. Both sections of the workforce staged strike action for a day each in February and March. They successfully registered their union during the strike and demanded regularization of temporary workers.[88] ASTI Electronics at Manesar, a subsidiary of Asti Corporation Japan, makes automobile wire harness and printed circuit boards for automobiles and appliances. According to *The Hindu*, termination of the services of casual workers employed through contractors is common in IMT Manesar. It cites economist Ravi Srivastava, member of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector:

> Increasing informalization and extremely precarious terms of work have created a latent militancy among workers. Contract workers do similar work as permanent workers and yet cannot get comparable wages or benefits. Women workers are even more vulnerable. We are still to see what will be the results of these ruptures.[89]

A 'rupture' to which he is referring is the refusal of all 310 temporary workers to accept their dismissal by ASTI at the beginning of November 2014. Of these, 250 are women in their twenties, mostly migrants from Nepal, Arunachal, Assam, Jharkhand or other parts of Haryana. The work performed by these temporary workers is tedious. The pressure of meeting targets has been increasing. Management has reduced toilet and tea breaks. It also increased the assembly-belt speed, so workers faint and a pregnant woman miscarried.[90] After the successful registering of the union by permanent and temporary workers acting together, management went on the offensive, further increasing the assembly-belt speed. Part of that offensive was the termination of temporary workers, designed to break the unity between them and permanent workers and tame the union by weakening it.[91] The company cited less work, a regular ploy to terminate workers in this industrial belt. Despite the difficulties of organizing and sustaining industrial action due to the precarious nature of their life and work conditions, this rupture is just one of the 60–70 strikes and other outbursts in the Gurgaon–Manesar–Dharuhera–Bawal industrial belt in the last few months of 2014.[92]

In the ASTI case, many of the dismissed contract workers had worked there for several years, earning between 6,000 and 7,000 rupees per month. On 3 November 2014 they began a protest, sitting on dharna in company grey-and-blue uniforms at the factory gate. After two rounds of negotiations failed and with the protest still in full swing, on 25 November, five female and two male workers began a 'fast-unto-death' hunger strike, also outside the gate.[93] Pushpa Negi, a 28-year-old woman who has worked at ASTI since 2011, explained the

workers could find other jobs for 5,000–6,000 rupees in another factory but they wanted the company to take them back at the same wages to the same posts. She stressed the militant action was motivated by principles and feelings of solidarity. 'We feel insulted in how the company dismissed us two minutes before the end of production. If we give up today, contract workers everywhere will only get treated worse than this.' The workers say they are uncertain of their future course but remain defiant. Negi adds: 'Sometimes even our families question us. We tell them we are right, we will not back down.'[94] *Kafila* reports that these workers are raising important questions, avoided by the central trade unions, about contractualization and informalization within workplaces. It considers the women workers' militancy and leadership is redefining gender relations within the workers' movement and that this 'struggle for work-livelihood-life' is unmasking the free-market developmental model proposed by Prime Minister Modi as the solution to India's problems and the path to progress for the country.[95]

There is widespread suspicion of central trade unions for being interested only in representing permanent workers. When a local union leader came to the dharna site for the first time on 28 November 2014, Negi called out to him: 'We will all commit suicide here, and put your name on the note, as the person answerable for our deaths.'[96] At that gate meeting called by the union, ASTI Theka Mazdoor Sangharsh Samiti (ASTI TMSS), there was, however, spirited participation from other factory unions such as Maruti Suzuki Workers Union Manesar, Endurance Employees Union, Satyam Auto Workers Union, Munjal Kiriu Workers Unions, Autofit Workers Union Dharuhera, Rico Employees Union Dharuhera and Baxter Workers Union Manesar. Also present in solidarity were workers' organizations like Workers Solidarity Centre Gurgaon, Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra and Krantikari Naujawan Sabha (KNS).[97]

Because the central trade unions have been 'dinosaurs acting as second-class management to feed the segmentation of workers', according to *Kafila*, new struggles have emerged from below to unite permanent and temporary workers, in the interests of all. Permanent workers in the vicinity mobilized to support the ASTI temporary workers' protest. Those at Munjal Kiriu two kilometres away were especially generous with 'concrete solidarity' at the ASTI gate meeting. Various independent unions from other nearby factories kept coming in solidarity, contributing financially, carrying out collections at their own factory gates to support the ASTI workers.[98] Manesar workers held a solidarity rally on 13 November that ended in front of the ASTI gate. On 17 November, ASTI workers were joined by workers from other factories in another strong rally in the Manesar industrial area.[99] Two days later the Munjal Kiriu Employees Union, where workers had been on strike for the previous two months, joined with ASTI TMSS in a joint demonstration of striking workers in Manesar at the ASTI factory gate, where the Haryana police and management agents tried to stop them. They were joined by workers and union members from Maruti Manesar, Hi-Lex Manesar, Endurance Manesar, Autofit Dharuhere and so on, who participated in the lively gate meeting, along with Workers Solidarity Centre Gurgaon, Inqlabi Mazdoor Kendra and KNS.[100]

On 20 November a one-day occupation strike in solidarity was staged by workers – contract, casual, apprentice, permanent – of Omax Auto in Dharuhera, Manesar and Bhiwadi and in Automax Binola, indicating the possibilities of 'concrete solidarity in generalizing struggles', according to *Kafila*.[101] KNS activists Anshita and Arya describe the protest scene late in November 2014: 'During gate meetings, one only sees the "formal" aspects of things, workers, agitated and protesting and a sea of other union leaders and representatives from nearby companies addressing the gathering. In the evenings, there is a different sense of solidarity, of collective sharing of joy and pain, jokes and songs.' The other workers had to be reassured not to feel sad for eating, as energies were needed to carry on the struggle. Apart from cleaning and cooking, they have to arrange meetings with the labour department, other unions or even the Chief Minister. Nonetheless, some of them would not eat, in solidarity with their comrades on an indefinite hunger strike. 'It is this spirit of struggle that has been most inspiring; irrespective of the bleak future that even they see for themselves, sometimes.'[102]

The appeal issued by ASTI TMSS on 3 December 2014 stated:

> We the contract workers of ASTI Electronics factory at IMT Manesar, Gurgaon are on Dharna from 3rd November and 7 of us continue fast-unto-death from 25th November with our just demands against contractualisation, illegal lay off, and exploitation.

The statement rejected the 'false arguments' of management that there was no work, emphasized most of the contract workers had been working in the factory for the previous four to five years in perennial assembly-line work and insisted they should be 'made permanent by law' because the contract was a sham. ASTI TMSS stated it was 'enthused to have received solidarity from workers in industrial belt … we are continuing with our struggle in the face of severe odds of anti-workers management-administration-police nexus. We are faced with a severe financial crisis which is becoming a hurdle in sustaining our struggle.'[103] With two of the seven hunger strikers hospitalized, the situation became even more serious, but the protesters remained firm. 'It is the resolute unity of contract workers who refuse to "take hisaab quietly and leave", that the struggle continues despite all odds', according to ASTI TMSS on 5 December.[104]

On 9 December the permanent workers inside the plant struck work in a sit-in inside the factory; when they returned to work they wore black bands around their foreheads as a form of protest against the management.[105] By then, unions from Maruti Suzuki Manesar, Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Motorcycle, Omax Auto, Satyam Auto, Endurance had come to the factory gate in solidarity, while other workers and unions were 'fast joining us', according to ASTI TMSS. Representatives from unions at Maruti Suzuki Manesar, Maruti Suzuki Gurgaon, Suzuki Powertrain, Suzuki Motorcycles, Autofit Dharuhere, Endurance Manesar, Baxter Manesar, Hero Honda Manesar went with ASTI TMSS members to the meeting with the Labour Commissioner in Gurgaon. The commissioner gave no

concrete answer, but ASTI TMSS commented: 'Today's solidarity strike action by the permanent workers have enthused us that our struggle is not in vain and that it is part of the common struggle of all workers across divisions and factories in the industrial belt!'[106] *Sanhati* commented: 'the permanent workers dared to take the risk of losing job and openly came in support of the struggles of contract workers'.[107]

Having failed to foster division between permanent and temporary workers by dismissing the latter, management attempted to break the solidarity of the contract workers. Management offered two months retrenchment compensation and hinted that workers of one department may be reinstated, but the workers continued to insist their dismissal was illegal, all workers should be reinstated, and contract workers could not be engaged due to the perennial nature of the work so all contract workers should be regularized. The workers demanded an agreement in writing. *Sanhati* articles reported: 'The workers are successfully fighting against such attempts of divide and rule.' In rejecting management offers, workers asserted 'it's not about the money only' but about dignity at work, the right to be made permanent and so on.[108] *Kafila* argued that similar exploitative conditions and repression of legitimate demands throughout the industrial belt engendered widespread sympathy, explaining why there was 'solidarity pouring in from workers and other factory Unions in the industrial belt'.[109]

The scourge of sweatshops: naming and shaming campaigns

The sweatshop – artefact of the nineteenth century – is again the symbol of super-exploited labour in the global economy. Unions have been particularly concerned with stamping out these worst cases of cheap labour, predominantly but not entirely located in developing countries. Sweatshop labour is typically associated with the making of products in *horizontally* integrated supply chains. Industrial disruption, as we have seen, can be an effective form of leverage in *vertically* integrated global supply chains, where different parts of the chain produce different products or services that are then combined to create the final product; JIT further increases the bargaining power of workers at each and every point in a vertically integrated supply chain. However, in horizontally integrated supply chains, where different factories dispersed globally produce the same or similar products, disruption in any particular factory will not halt production elsewhere or stop significantly the supply of products to the market. The global apparel industry is a classic example of horizontally integrated supply chains.

Because of the especially weak position of sweatshop workers in horizontally integrated supply chains, labour movement activists and labour rights advocates have found the best strategy to improve wages and conditions is in conjunction with consumers and civil-society actors such as non-government organizations (NGOs). Naming and shaming corporations, in conjunction with workers mobilizing on the ground, has been the principal campaign tactic for the past quarter

century. Unions have exploited the fact that transnational corporations are sensitive to consumer pressure and concerned about their image. They have collaborated with NGOs and consumer organizations to place pressure on corporations such as Nike, Reebok, IKEA, Levi Strauss and C&A to observe labour codes. Enforcement is always a problem but this does not detract from the significance of union action and collaboration with other progressive forces. Given the decline of the regulatory state, cooperation with NGOs is an important development in union armoury.[110]

Unions have even established some of the major NGOs involved. A well-known example is the AFL-CIO Union Summer project launched in 1996, which placed hundreds of college students in summer internships in organizing and collective bargaining campaigns, encouraging them to build centres of labour activism on their return to campus. With the aid and encouragement of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees, a remorseless campaigner against sweatshops at home and abroad, the Students Against Sweatshops movement quickly took hold on American campuses, with successful sit-ins at many universities and the formation of a national umbrella organization, United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS).[111] To the embarrassment of Nike and other major brands, this union initiative has become a startling contribution to the struggles of workers in developing countries.

In April 2000 the Worker Rights Consortium (WRC) was established by labour, student and human rights groups. WRC hires staff in countries where collegiate apparel is produced, who develop networks of unions and NGOs in these countries. They identify factories where serious labour abuses are occurring and where real gains could be achieved by and for workers. When the WRC finds that codes of conduct are being violated, students use this information to press universities to ensure that licensees correct the abuses. As a result, some garment workers have begun to achieve genuine victories and substantial improvements have been made.[112] G.W. Seidman stresses it is essential in such campaigning that the workers on the ground have the loudest voice: campaigns are less likely to be effective if imposed from the outside without consideration of local factors or if they treat the workers concerned as purely victims without agency; campaigns work best when the external boycott or shaming movement supports on-the-ground organizing. Global campaigns should also focus on changing the behaviour of states, to guarantee labour rights and standards.[113]

John Hogan and others argue that consumer boycotts can be very effective, so the conjunction of labour with consumers has emerged as an important campaign tool not just in the apparel industry but elsewhere, especially food production. An example of social-movement action linked to labour issues is the highly visible campaign around ‘fair trade’ chocolate to change the conditions of West African cocoa labour and eradicate widespread child-labour in this sector.[114] They suggest further that such campaigns are, in effect, good advertising for unionism. They inform the global public about the strategies harnessed by organized labour in providing critical counterbalances to corporate power.[115]

Others are less sanguine about such campaigns. Sarah Adler-Milstein and others found that, even as workers in individual factories won tremendous victories, the WRC continued to uncover abusive conditions at nearly every factory it investigated, and plants that had been the site of major labour rights breakthroughs often began to report losses in orders as brands refused to support the higher costs that come with improved conditions. The fundamentally flawed structure of the global apparel industry was preventing sweeping progress being achieved and maintained:

> The deck is stacked against the universities, students, workers, and consumers seeking to ensure workers' rights are respected. Multinational apparel brands can still shop around the globe for the lowest prices. They can repeatedly place orders in factories that are documented serial rights violators, and pull orders from factories that are making progress toward compliance, without facing any negative consequences.[116]

Sanjiv Pandita and Fahmi Panimbang cite the case of the high-profile, apparently successful 2012 campaign to dismantle sweatshops run by Nike subcontractor PT Nikomas in Serang, Indonesia. Most of the workers did not receive their unpaid wages, and Nike's business continued as usual, based on sweatshop labour elsewhere. They point also to evidence that NGOs and unions have become involved in monitoring for companies engaged in the public relations exercise known as Corporate Social Responsibility. As a consequence, unions join this bandwagon instead of concentrating on their core work at the grassroots level. They conclude these global supply chains cannot simply be reformed. Naming and shaming campaigns directed at particular corporations are important and necessary, but not sufficient as they do not change the whole system. Effective collective bargaining by workers and communities in the global supply chain needs broader working-class solidarity. Yet the supply chain causes difficulties in organizing workers; and collective bargaining with transnational employers and state authorities who favour corporate interests is problematic. Given the deep divisions and competition that easily arise among workers in global supply chains (of industry, employment status, race/class/gender), 'it is critical to articulate the commonalities for the working class a whole, which may formulate the basis for broader solidarity and formation of common strategies and goals for collective bargaining'.[117]

Adler-Milstein and others share Pandita and Panimbang's stance yet maintain that meaningful victories have nonetheless been won that point the way to the broader changes necessary. They discuss three current initiatives that are examples of genuine reform. The Alta Gracia Project in the Dominican Republic shows how Knights Apparel's commitment to market a sweat-free product has brought living wages and union organizing rights to their Dominican Republic factory. A union in Honduras has broken new ground by signing two agreements with multinational brands that cover multiple factories and contain specific, legally enforceable obligations. Under the Designated Suppliers Program proposed by USAS and

endorsed by the WRC, universities require that their licensees source university logo apparel from supplier factories independently verified to comply with workers' rights standards.[118]

The Honduras victory depended very much on workplace agitation. In 2008 Russell Athletic announced the closure of a Honduras factory as part of its campaign to shut down unionizing activity. The union and its allies, notably USAS, launched a campaign that succeeded in persuading around 100 universities to terminate their contracts with Russell. In November 2009 Russell signed a legally enforceable agreement with the union not only to reopen the factory, but to provide back pay and respect workers' freedom of association at eight Russell factories in Honduras, a major breakthrough for Honduran workers and garment workers around the world.[119] Russell had never signed a contract with any union during its 100 years of operation in the USA. Evangelina Argueta, one of the union organizers, said the Russell victory was important because it confounded the myth perpetuated by Honduras business leaders that it was impossible to organize and that unions would never be tolerated.[120]

In May 2011 the union at the reopened factory, Jeezees Nuevo Dia, negotiated a collective bargaining agreement that brought significant wage increases for the 1,200 re-employed workers, and company commitment to increased hiring and investment. Norma, on the union bargaining team, stated: 'Before, no line operator would have been able to sit down with an employer to demand her rights and ask for benefits, but now we can do that thanks to our union organization.' The Honduras factory workers' union, SitrajerzeesND, an affiliate of the Confederación General de Trabajadores (General Confederation of Labour), has engaged directly with Russell to run freedom of association training at Russell plants in Honduras and to resolve plant-level issues through the dispute resolution mechanism established by the original agreement. The Honduras Confederación General de Trabajadores, after USAS campaigning, also succeeded in extracting an agreement from Nike in July 2010, which ensured that Nike took financial responsibility for correcting a violation committed by two of its supplier factories, which closed in 2009 without paying legally required terminal benefits to about 1,500 workers. This set an example by addressing a case of one of the most common forms of wage theft in the industry, an important precedent indicating the potential of agreements directly between labour unions and international brands.[121]

It is the Honduras model upon which the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety builds. Bangladesh's ultra-low wages, around 18 cents an hour, are part of a concerted strategy by the garment industry there, the second largest producer of apparel in the world, to establish itself as the world's cheapest source of labour in direct response to the relentless price pressure exerted by the global garment industry. The tragedy that killed 1,132 workers and injured more than 2,000 in April 2013 when Dhaka's Rana Plaza factory collapsed was only the most spectacular in a series of deadly fire and building safety disasters that have taken the lives of more than 1,800 Bangladeshi garment workers since 2005.[122]

Within a month of the Rana Plaza disaster, UNI and IndustriALL, the two relevant Global Unions, used this template to sign a comprehensive agreement with more than three dozen of the world's largest apparel brands and retailers. By 2014 more than 60 brands had committed to this binding agreement to prevent future disasters.[123] The Bangladesh Accord rejects the voluntary corporate code of conduct model, instead mandating that all signatories sign legally binding contracts that generate a joint financial responsibility on the part of the Bangladesh contract manufacturers and the global brands and retailers that use them.[124] Mark Anner and others describe the Bangladesh Accord as 'a new paradigm in the enforcement of global labor and human rights', drawing parallels with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union campaign that forced a drastic decline in sweatshop conditions in the US apparel industry during the mid-twentieth century, triggered by the 112 lives lost in New York's Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in 1911.[125]

Voluntary self-regulation by the industry was always a farce. Studies have shown that, in actual operation, codes of conduct do not improve how retailers purchase their goods or how contractors and sub-contractors manufacture them.[126] However, binding agreements between workers and the brands for which they produce, brought about by a combination of workplace activism and consumer pressure, can be effective. An extensive study of the Sri Lankan operations of the Swedish polymer technology corporation Trelleborg found global agreements to be far more effective in promoting workers' rights than codes of conduct, which can have negative effects on promoting the formation of local unions and the signing of global agreements.[127]

Agreements need to contain important elements present in both the Honduras agreements and the Bangladesh Accord. First, any commitment must be binding in a court of law. Second, specific commitments on freedom of association are crucial; if workers cannot speak out against abuses and organize collectively to seek redress, long-term change is impossible. Third, brands must commit to pay prices that enable supplier factories to comply with their obligations. Fourth, brands must commit to a long-term purchasing commitment to ensure the factory has time to make real progress. Fifth, a living wage is crucial to making real change in workers' lives; to date, brands have been reluctant to guarantee real income increases, so real wages in key garment producing countries continue to fall.[128]

For more than a century unions have battled the scourge of sweatshops; and do so now on a global scale, involving Global Unions and NGOs on the one hand and ground-level union activism in developing countries on the other. IndustriALL welcomed two unions from Myanmar to its membership in January 2015. One of these, the Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar, has emerged in the garment industry in Myanmar, as Myanmar becomes integrated into the world capitalist system and becomes a new hub for the garment and textile industries.[129] Where sweatshops set up, resistance against the odds nonetheless develops.

Notes

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5 Countering capital mobility

> Modern industry has established the world-market.… This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication … and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade.… The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere.
>
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Capital flight and unfair trade

An important aim of the globalization project is to enhance the freedom of corporations to operate across national boundaries. This peripatetic nature of contemporary capitalism is widely deemed a fundamental feature of globalization. Free trade ensures the largest corporations extract maximum advantage from heightened locational mobility, far from the mutually beneficial interactions envisaged by those often cited as authorities by neoliberals. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) insisted the market could produce beneficial results when capital was 'rooted in place in the locality where its owner lived', when 'no buyer or seller is sufficiently large to influence the market price' and as long as governments did not subsidize economic elites and defend the rich and propertied against the poor. David Ricardo's 1817 theory of 'free trade' maintained that trade between two countries could be mutually advantageous, but only if the participating countries both had full employment, if the total trade was balanced, if capital was prohibited from travelling between high- and low-wage countries, and if the countries could each produce an item at comparative advantage.[1]

Free trade benefits the strong, which is why transnational corporations enthusiastically pursue the free-trade agenda through the WTO, which polices the 'right' to free trade institutionalized in 1994 by the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Free-trade policies prevent governments imposing tariff barriers that would raise the price of imports thereby protecting local industries from market competition and workers from lower-wage competition in other

countries; and discourage governments from subsidizing agricultural production. In the past, developed countries benefited from protectionist and rural support policies. These not only protected workers' wages and conditions but permitted industrial development and economic growth; and kept farmers on the land. These richer countries now seek, through the WTO, to prevent developing countries from acting likewise. At the huge protest at the WTO meeting in Cancun in September 2003, a Korean farmer stabbed himself to death, carrying a sign saying 'WTO Kills Farmers'.[2]

If preventing developing countries pursuing policies historical beneficial to developed ones is not sufficient hypocrisy, richer nations do not practise what they nowadays preach. At the time of the Hong Kong meeting of the WTO in December 2005, government support for domestic producers via high tariffs, quotas, producer subsidies and export subsidies provided 18 per cent of farm income in the USA, 33 per cent in the EU and 56 per cent in Japan.[3] Free-trade agreements have the potential to cause division between unions in developed and developing countries. Especially in manufacturing, trade unions in developed countries might support free-trade agreements that secure export markets for 'their' companies, while trade unions in developing countries might oppose such agreements that would undermine production in theirs.

The hypermobility of capital is not simply an aspiration and aspect of globalization but also a corporate weapon of choice: actual or threatened locational freedom is used to subordinate workforces in higher-wage countries. During the post-war boom until the mid-1970s, the power of workers to withdraw labour counteracted the natural inclination on the part of employers to pay their employees as little as possible. However, increasingly from the 1980s, it has been capital rather than labour that has utilized the threat of its own withdrawal. Greater capital mobility in the global epoch brought us 'capital flight', equivalent to perpetual potential strike action by capital. More broadly, it embeds and expands neoliberal objectives in countries more liable to desertion by capital: those with better wages and working conditions, stronger welfare systems and stricter environmental protection laws than elsewhere.

Globalization has been described as a corporate project to achieve 'downward leveling' by pitting workers everywhere against each other.[4] The most common explanation of the crisis of labour movements, as Silver noted in 2003, was that the hypermobility of capital has created a single labour market in which all of the world's workers are forced to compete. By moving or just threatening to move production, multinational corporations have brought the competitive pressure of unorganized workers to bear on the international labour movement, weakening labour's bargaining power and unleashing a 'race to the bottom' in wages and working conditions.[5] In Negri's words, the continuing process of decomposition of the mass worker in developed countries is facilitated by the relocation of mass industrial production to lower-wage economies.[6]

Time and again, workers in developed countries are threatened with plant closure or downsizing if wage demands are pressed or union organizing drives undertaken. Known as 'whipsawing', such industrial intimidation by which

management extracts concessions from labour is commonplace.[7] *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert observed in 2005: 'Workers have been so cowed by an environment in which they are so obviously dispensable that they have been afraid to ask for the raises they deserve, or for their share of the money derived from the remarkable increases in worker productivity over the past few years.'[8] It matters not whether company threats are idle. The mere possibility of capital flight creates a climate of labour-force vulnerability that encourages self-policing of wage demands.[9]

Whether actual or merely threatened, capital flight is used to good corporate effect against both governments and workforces, especially with high unemployment augmenting this increased bargaining power of capital. It enables corporations to extract incentives such as reduced company taxation and anti-labour legislation from governments at the same time as they intimidate workforces with prospects of relocation if demands are pressed. The *Guardian* reported that 111 of the top 175 economic entities in the world in 2011 were corporations that straddle the globe like colossi and pressure lawmakers to desist from curbing their territorial ambitions or profit potential: 'They make menacing virtue of their multinational structures, threatening uncooperative states with taking their business elsewhere. The result is a source of power that has grown beyond democracy's reach. In the real-life face-off between the democratic David and the corporate Goliath, David can look puny indeed.'[10] Corporations also extract bribes to remain onshore, from governments then unable or unwilling to fund public services to adequate levels. Amongst the countless examples of 'corporate welfare' is the 'multibillion dollar package' paid from 2002 to 2015 by Australian governments to Mitsubishi to keep its South Australian car operations open. And to what end? Mitsubishi announced in 2008 it would nonetheless cease producing cars in South Australia; and at least 500 workers lost their jobs.[11]

Chapter 8 discusses labour movement responses to marketization, a process encouraged by this manipulation of governments under threat of capital flight. Silver describes this effect as the 'indirect impact' of the hypermobility of capital: the pressure on states to repeal social welfare provision and other fetters on profit maximization within their borders in order to avoid being abandoned by investors scouring the world for the highest possible returns.[12] The more direct impact of capital flight is its effect on workers' wages and conditions in higher-wage economies – at the same time as it ruthlessly exploits cheaper labour elsewhere and distorts economic development in poorer countries. The following sections examine labour movement responses to the direct problems caused by enhanced capital mobility and unfair free trade.

The evolution of labour transnationalism

Labour movement internationalism has been with us for more than a century, for example amongst maritime workers.[13] In the present era, footloose corporations are starting to be circumvented by new forms of labour organization that encourage transnational working-class cooperation in a concerted and systematic

fashion. Where international solidarity efforts were once spontaneous, often flamboyant affairs, they are nowadays likely to be subterranean and unspectacular, the result of sheer hard work at the grassroots workplace level and within the evolving bureaucracies of transnational labour institutions. Since the late 1980s there has been significant expansion in labour transnationalism of both official, institutional kinds and of rank-and-file actions occurring beyond these formal structures.

The opportunities for labour organization to chase capitalism to the furthest corners of the globe are provided by the forces of globalization. Despite the immense problems for labour created by the mobility of capital, its peripatetic nature also brings with it dangers for its owners. By bringing capitalist production so forcibly to more parts of the globe, globalization is developing the basis for international working-class solidarity. The previous chapter has shown how relocation of much production to developing countries encourages working-class formation and composition in those countries. It provides the basis for labour movements in both developing and developed countries to form more meaningful linkages at the same time as it makes it necessary for them to do so.

The employment circumstances imposed on workers by globalization makes an internationalist response from unions in the developed world more naturally forthcoming, because this protects their economic interests. There are compelling material reasons for the better-paid workers of the world to fight to raise the wages of lower-paid workers. Amory Starr describes the labour movement as the 'natural leader' of 'globalization from below', because of the threat posed by globalization from above. As assembly lines have stretched across the globe and flexible production processes have made it easy to exchange one workforce for another, unions are overcoming the divide that formerly positioned developed world workers' standard of living as dependent on developing world workers' cheap labour. Workers are realizing that the logic of 'international competitiveness' drives all wages down. 'Unions are widely recognizing the need to bring the standards of all workers up in order to make all workers safe.'[14]

Especially auspicious is the emergence or growth of unions in lower-wage economies with whom developed world labour movements can collaborate. Growth of organized labour in the new investment sites fosters newfound collaborations across industrial sectors as well as national boundaries. Moody argues:

> If capitalism is now more global than ever, so too is the working class it begets.… Even within most nations, the world-wide class that is still forming also crosses borders with greater regularity, is more ethnically diverse, and international in nature.… Both in the international division of labor and in the geographic movements of working people, a transnational working class has arisen and spread. The material substance of working-class internationalism is at hand.[15]

The potential for collaboration is enhanced by transnational corporate employment patterns in which an injury to workers anywhere can be resisted by workers

elsewhere. The old labour movement maxim of 'An injury to one, an injury to all' must, and now increasingly can, be played out on a global stage.

The global working class in the making is thus better suited to international solidarity than previously. Labour transnationalism involves unions utilizing transnational networks through global union structures and/or directly with each other, and organizing global resistance campaigns by acting across borders. In principle, labour transnationalism is a positive-sum game for the workers of the world, despite corporate rhetoric that suggests workers in developing countries are grateful to work at any price under any conditions and will prosper as a result. In reality, workers in developing countries desire better wages and conditions, and are struggling against the odds to attain these goals. Every improvement there is manifestly in the interests of workers in the developed world, because it reduces the degree of labour market competition. The general focus of labour transnationalism therefore is the development and enforcement of agreed acceptable standards under which labour is performed anywhere, efforts that are producing more stable and productive alliances between unions in the developed and developing worlds.

Labour transnationalism is becoming distinct from older-style posturing on the part of developed countries' labour movements about developing countries' labour standards. This was understandably seen by developing countries as 'Western protectionism', as Indian unions put it around the turn of the millennium during debates about lobbying of the WTO to include a workers' rights 'social clause'. Led by Brazilian and South African union confederations, developing country unions criticized developed world unions for not adequately reflecting the needs and aspirations of workers most adversely affected by globalization and argued for a strategy that critiqued the whole development agenda.[16] To work towards united rather than opposed positions on work and workers' rights, labour transnationalism aspires to ensure that the subject of labour transnationalism is Everyworker: not only the unionized worker in a developed economy but also the more vulnerable and marginalized worker wherever s/he might labour.

Battles to protect Everyworker are best fought via international collaboration, whether these are general or particular skirmishes. There might be broad-based campaigns to oppose the use of child-labour or unsafe workplaces, for example. Or a corporate insult or injury offered a group of workers somewhere might be met by solidarity actions elsewhere on the planet. International collaboration might confound typical employer machinations in an industry: if corporations offshore certain operations to lower-wage countries, joint insistence on minimum rates and conditions for performing the same work, regardless of location, can be successful. Especially problematic is the regular corporate strategy of threatened or real relocation of plant to lower-wage economies unless workers accept worse employment terms. Each immediate instance is difficult or impossible to defeat; but 'reverse whipsawing' has started to happen, with transnational solidarity connecting workers in weaker positions with those in stronger bargaining positions. The longer-term agenda of labour transnationalism is to raise all workers'

wages and conditions to similar high levels to undermine capital's remorseless pursuit of cheap labour.

The task for labour transnationalism is immense. It is far easier for corporations to globetrot at the whim of profitability, playing workers off against each other, than it is for workers' organizations to collaborate to prevent or reduce adverse impacts on wages, conditions and employment levels. Nonetheless labour transnationalism has made significant progress in the past quarter century, indicating the aspiration of labour movements internationally to counter capital's attempts to divide and rule workers on a truly world stage for the first time in history. Marx and Engels' prescient description of the spread of capitalism around the globe concluded with their famous rallying call for workers of all countries to unite. For nine years from 1864 the International Working Men's Association attempted, with some successes, to put these principles into practice, to begin to bring about 'the eternal union of the proletarians of all countries'.[17] By the close of the twentieth century, commentators were drawing attention to the much greater possibilities for Marx and Engels' internationalist vision to be realized in the globalizing epoch.[18] Ronaldo Munck argued in 2002 that the 'national period' in labour history was over; workers were developing a sense of common interest and new ways of organizing that transcend national boundaries.[19]

Unionists on the ground agreed. In 1997 New Zealand Footwear and Clothing Workers Union secretary Robert Reid enthused about increasing transnational labour activity and the international trade union movement policy to develop the international solidarity of workers and trade unions, to 'build a counter-power' to that of the big trade organizations and corporations.[20] Unions adapted organizational structures to conform to the transnational spirit of the times. For instance, in 2004 the SEIU launched its Global Partnerships Unit on the grounds that the union needed to move global 'as capital has done'.[21] Kate Bronfenbrenner's 2007 collection of studies of Global Unions described the innovative strategies and alliances starting to be used to mount cross-border campaigns against powerful transnational corporations such as Walmart and Exxon Mobil.[22]

Institutionalized forms of labour transnationalism became more integrated at the highest level, aided by the demise of the Soviet-backed World Federation of Trade Unions and the ending of the Cold War, which enabled the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), the international peak federation of unions with social-democratic leanings founded in 1949, to emerge during the 1990s as an unrivalled peak confederation with an increasing number of affiliates. By the mid-1990s it could claim to represent 125 million workers in 206 national trade union centres in 141 countries. In 1996 the ICFTU declared that it 'aims to be at the centre of a worldwide social movement'.[23]

Was this likely? Gerard Greenfield pointed to the problem of the 'politics of compromise' advanced at this time by the ICFTU leadership and national union leaders that sought to displace alternative forms of action, including attempts to build class-struggle unionism or social-movement unionism.[24] Social-movement unionism, at its highpoint around this time, had strong international reflections.

Much transnational labour movement activity, as Moody stressed in 1997, was 'rank-and-file internationalism' – international exchanges, networks and cross-border solidarity campaigns taking place outside official union hierarchies.[25] There were tensions between institutional labour transnationalism and rank-and-file 'new labour internationalism' in both the developed and the developing world.[26] Peter Waterman and Jane Wills documented the 'new labour internationalism' of the 1990s that was more than the old-style trade union internationalism reflected in the ICFTU. Their edited collection provides examples from around the world of rank-and-file transnational union initiatives organizing global resistance campaigns.[27]

Clearly taking cues from the anti-capitalist movement in its heyday at this time, the 'new labour internationalism' was about new ways of organizing solidarity, eschewing the bureaucratic, hierarchical and centralized methods embodied in the ICFTU, in favour of momentary, fluid, horizontal, decentralized structures with open decision making. It emphasized mobilization and campaigning and the need to build coalitions and networks with other social movements. And for 'new labour internationalism', the subject of labour transnationalism was certainly the marginalized worker of the global South as much as the established unionized worker of the global North.[28] The ICFTU and the other institutions of labour transnationalism responded to this more militant mood from below. Greenfield had described the ICFTU in 1996 as 'global business unionism', but acknowledged in 1998 that there were new and important solidarity campaigns involving international union federations choosing to support local struggles through concerted international action that challenged global capital.[29]

Robert O'Brien argued in 2000 that the role of the international union movement was transforming from a supporter of US capitalism to a brake on neoliberal industrial relations. Optimistically, he imagined that international organizations would have to amend neoliberal economic prescriptions as they faced increasing resistance in developed and developing states; this would transform policies at institutions such as the IMF, OECD, World Bank and WTO; states would come under pressure as transnational cooperation bolstered the enforcement of minimum workers' rights, challenging the political control of authoritarian states over their populations, shifting the balance toward social-democratic forms of industrial relations and away from neoliberal models. 'A revitalized labour movement would play a significant role in influencing the structures of the global economy and improving the conditions under which people live and work.'[30] Munck likewise concluded in 2002 that, with the labour movement acting in a more transnational manner, the trade union movement could play a major role in the regulation of the global economic system that was largely out of control.[31]

However, in 2005 Stuart Hodkinson dismissed such optimism, arguing the ICFTU's futile, diplomatic lobbying approach to the WTO to include a workers' rights 'social clause' and its neoliberal vocabulary of 'flexibility' and 'partnership' indicated abandonment of social democracy in favour still of 'global business unionism'.[32] Before considering the Global Unions' project, it is appropriate

to acknowledge the role of regional labour transnationalism as an important component and building-block of wider forms of internationalism.

Regional labour transnationalism

The emergence of transnational labour institutions in the twenty-first century was accompanied and, to an extent, preceded by systematic growth in regional transnational labour organization and mobilization, aided by internet technology. There are many examples around the world; the following accounts provide glimpses of just some of these.

Australian workers have high wage levels by international standards, but in the immediate vicinity of the area that is the preferred cheap labour destination for globalizing corporations. Through the ACTU, Australian unions decided during the 1980s to assist local union organizations in Asian countries, so these would be better able to demand improved wages and conditions, thereby reducing competitive discrepancies in the Asian region from which Australian workers would also benefit. In 1989 the ACTU facilitated the establishment of the South Pacific and Oceanic Council of Trades Unions, headquartered in Brisbane, to 'act as the trade union body of the entire region to give collective expression to demands and aspirations of trade unions as representatives of the working people', 'promote mutual assistance to safeguard trade union rights and freedom against encroachments' and 'facilitate effective coordination of *solidarity* support'.[33] By 1999, deep international linkages existed between the union movements of the region, despite huge variations in wages and conditions.[34]

The ACTU's decision to prioritize solidarity relations, based on recognition of the material, social and political needs of all workers, synergized with the Congress of South African Trade Unions' (COSATU) vision of a southern movement in the formation in 1991 of the Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR). This network linked militant unions in South America, Southern Africa, Asia and Australasia with a particular interest in South-South cooperation and global action campaigning.[35] SIGTUR activities included mobilization of mass protests against free-trade agreements and privatizations; and a 2011 venture linking workers in Hyundai factories in Chennai and Seoul to coordinate collective bargaining with simultaneous action, including logistical 'go slows'. For SIGTUR coordinator Rob Lambert, SIGTUR fills a space in the architecture of labour internationalism through the spatial linkage of democratic unions in the Global South, markedly different from the linkages from the South to the politically dominant European centres of established labour transnationalism. 'This new configuration is energized by a political culture of human agency shaped by the colonial histories of the south and committed to a struggle against free trade in all its manifestations.'[36]

The tale of regional transnational labour organizing in North America indicates how the problem of capital flight can encourage new forms of working-class solidarity across national borders, especially when a free-trade agreement prevents protection of workers' wages and conditions from the impact of capital

mobility. Hourly manufacturing wages in Mexico in 2008 were about 16 per cent of the US level.[37] While not enduring the same exploitation as Mexican workers, especially those in the maquiladoras, North American workers in various sectors are badly affected by NAFTA, which came into effect 1 January 1994. NAFTA prompted workers north of the border into action. David Bacon's experience as union organizer on this border persuaded him that progressive developments among workers in both Mexico and the USA owe their origins to NAFTA: 'but for the treaty, interest among U.S. workers in their co-workers south of the border would have remained low, as it had been for decades'.[38] AFL-CIO unions with little prior experience of trans-border work in the Americas were galvanized into action, working with organizations such as the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM) and the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade.[39]

In the wake of NAFTA there were many more practical examples of regional labour mobilization initiated by labour organizations.[40] Material interest was at last prompting internationalist responsiveness. Victoria Carty's study of cross-border labour mobilization in two Mexican maquiladoras revealed that, while NAFTA strengthens the ability of those in power to impose their will on more marginalized groups, it also enhanced the connection between workers in the North and South as they came to recognize that they share a common enemy in their respective struggles. 'Jobs have been exported from the North to the South on an unprecedented scale. This means jobs for workers in Mexico, but under exploitative conditions. This has negative consequences for workers in both countries.' To combat these forms of abuse, she shows how workers are collectively focusing their anger on what they understand to be the collusion between the elite representatives of transnational corporations and their governments that work on behalf of business interests rather than on those of their citizens. 'This convergence is occurring because globalization is creating common interests … that transcend both national and interest-group boundaries.'[41] Carty describes how strikes at the Duro plant in Rio Bravo in 2000 and the Kukdong factory in Puebla in 2001 were backed up by AFL-CIO action in the USA. Union-sponsored educational campaigns were a necessary prelude to this degree of transnational organization. AFL-CIO-sponsored speaking tours informed the public about globalization, the race to the bottom and its effects. This encouraged workers in the USA and Canada to recognize that Mexican workers were also victims of NAFTA and to humanize the conflict. It also created awareness that solidarity across borders was crucial to forging effective resistance in the interests of workers on both sides.[42]

Marking the twentieth anniversary of NAFTA, Roman and Arregui argue that the corporate offensive of the Canadian, US and Mexican ruling classes, embodied in NAFTA, has 'sown the seeds of resistance both by the intensification of hardship and suffering and the unintended promotion of cross-border working-class links'. The mass migration of Mexican labourers northward has also created an integrated 'continental' working class, now carrying the 'spark' of the rich traditions of struggle and collectivity of Mexican workers and the 'fuel' of

the resources and organization of the Canadian and US labour movements. 'Rather than gold to line the pockets of the corporate alchemists, the intense heat may produce the energetic and resolute re-emergence of the salt of the earth, the working classes of the continent, imbued with a renewed determination to build a new North America.'[43] The 2015 strikes of Mexican farmworkers, described in Chapter 4, have been supported by American unionists picketing relevant company sites and urging boycotts in a huge display of Mexico-US labour solidarity.[44]

Europe has been the pacesetter in terms of regional labour transnationalism, mostly but not entirely under the auspices of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Since the mid-1990s there has been concerted cross-border union collaboration on the issue of wage levels, to exchange information and coordinate bargaining policy. German unions were especially proactive in forging Europe-wide union connections, recognizing the increasing need of a European perspective in collective bargaining with employers. For example, in 1999 German construction union IG BAU signed an agreement on cross-border wage-bargaining coordination with the Austrian and Swiss construction unions, followed in 2000 with a similar agreement with unions from Belgium and the Netherlands.[45]

Unions in particular sectors and in particular regions stepped up coordination to the point of creating supranational bodies with a certain degree of authority and resources. Some of the supranational bodies created in this period were the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers; the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers' Federation; and the European Metalworkers Federation. The aim was to coordinate the wage-bargaining policies of member unions and prevent 'wage dumping'.[46] Collective bargaining on a Europe-wide basis has become an increasingly significant aspect of European trade union activity, as Anne Dufresne's recent history of 'l'euro-syndicalisme' shows.[47]

An important development in European regional labour transnationalism, after many years of lobbying by the ETUC, was the establishment of European Works' Councils (EWCs) following the European Commission's adoption in 1994 of a directive that established a transnational right to employee participation. By 2000 about 500 EWCs covered at least 15 million employees across 1,500 transnational corporations to ensure on-site representation for workers of the same corporation operating across the EU. Writing about the future of the American labour movement, a former president of the United Steelworkers of America observed:

> one of the most dynamic elements on the European scene is the mandating of works councils across borders. This is the single strongest push in the direction of international collective bargaining, or, more accurately, international collective action concerning workers' rights and representation that is being undertaken anywhere throughout the world.[48]

In automobile manufacturing, for example, EWCs have improved workers' leverage in bargaining and helped to limit whipsawing.[49] The EWC at GM

managed to mobilize European plants in simultaneous strikes against redundancies in 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2007, from which workers benefitted when the company was forced to revise its plans. Each successive dispute or action brought the workers together and strengthened their relationship, in turn developing into more institutionalization and socialization towards a transnational perspective. Sustainability of cooperation was enhanced by flexible organization that took account of national differences. The fact that workers were striking in a coordinated way probably contributed to formation of a shared identity. However, Katarzyna Gajewska concedes that contacts between them mainly took place between plant representatives rather than ordinary workers.[50]

These EWCs were seen as a successful prototype by the Global Union Federations, which called in 2002 for 'global works councils'.[51] In automobile production these had already been achieved with a World Employee Council at DaimlerChrysler and a World Works Council at Volkswagen.[52] They developed around the turn of the millennium as logical extensions of the EWCs, an example of regional labour transnationalism serving as a building-block for worldwide equivalents. Twenty years since their inception, over 1,000 EWCs have been established in multinational companies operating in Europe. Some observers regard EWCs as an important vehicle for transnational labour solidarity with the capacity to significantly influence employment relations in companies; others warn they are 'fool's gold' and neither European nor works councils.[53]

Many European labour activists wanted more militancy than the ETUC and EWCs were inclined to encourage. At the same time as these institutionalized forms of regional labour transnationalism were emerging, new forms of more radical trade unionism and wider networks of resistance, such as the Euromarches/European Marches network, developed within the European labour movement to challenge the underlying acceptance of neoliberalism and strategy of social partnership advocated to a large extent by the ETUC. Euromarches, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, developed in the late 1990s from isolated national mobilizations in defence of jobs and welfare, to European mobilizations that increasingly represented an alternative strategy for labour movement renewal.[54] These more radical initiatives, according to Gajewska, affected the ETUC, which: incorporated campaigning activities into its repertoire of action; engaged in greater cooperation with other social movements; organized demonstrations at EU summits and the European Parliament opposing the application of free-market rules to public services; and mobilized against neoliberal initiatives such as the liberalization of port services in 2006, successfully defeated by European dockers.[55]

Global Unions in the twenty-first century

The adverse impacts on labour of capital mobility are mitigated if nation-based unions are complemented by truly global ones. Certainly, the existence of global unions helps to counteract the perception that unions are powerless to improve wages and conditions, given the degree of capital mobility. However, labour

transnationalism brings with it an added layer of bureaucracy: the institutions of labour transnationalism that have developed significantly in the past two decades and known now as Global Unions.

Global Unions present a more united front than labour in many national jurisdictions, where union confederations compete with each other for a range of religious, political or geographical reasons, but do large complex organizations prioritize institutional survival and tend towards conservative responses to important issues? Are Global Unions more interested in representing the world's workers in 'seats at the table' of grand gatherings rather than organizing and mobilizing them at ground level? Does their bureaucratic nature impede speedy and meaningful solidaristic endeavours; or does their professional administration instead enable well-organized effective forms of support? There is no doubting the integrity and dedication of Global Unions staff; they could earn considerably more in other occupations. But do these complicated new supranational organizations, staffed mainly by labour bureaucrats remote from the harshest forms of exploitation, sufficiently ameliorate that exploitation to justify their existences, even if on lean budgets? In surveying the emergence of Global Unions, these are questions to consider.

The terminology of 'Global Unions' emerged around the turn of the millennium and was used to refer to the ICFTU's Global Unions website at www.global-unions.org, which Myconos described as a 'transnational cyber-alliance'. Enhanced by advances in language-translation software, it made possible movement-wide electronic bulletin boards, email-based discussion groups, global on-line video conferences and access to global interactive databases containing information on transnational corporations and management strategies.[56] Nowadays the name 'Global Unions' is used for the major institutions of the international trade union movement.

Based at International Trade Union House at 5 Boulevard du Roi Albert II in Brussels, Global Unions comprises: the International Trade Unions Confederation (ITUC); nine Global Union Federations (GUFs) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD. While 'Global Unions' refers to these major institutions collectively, each GUF also refers to itself as a Global Union. To add to the confusion, Global Unions is also still the name of the website that is jointly owned and managed by the 11 Global Unions organizations, which explains that Global Unions are international trade union organizations working together with a shared commitment to the ideals and principles of the trade union movement. 'They share a common determination to organize, to defend human rights and labour standards everywhere, and to promote the growth of trade unions for the benefit of all working men and women and their families.'[57]

The International Trade Unions Confederation

The ICFTU was formally dissolved on 31 October 2006 when it merged with its rival, the much smaller Christian-based World Confederation of Labour, to form the International Trade Unions Confederation.[58] The ITUC represents most

national trade union peak bodies; so most individual unions in the world relate to the ITUC through their national union centre. In 2014, the ITUC calculated there were 200 million independently unionized workers, most of whom were represented in the ITUC, with the same number again belonging to unions not independent of government, as in China. However, 40 per cent of the world's 2.9 billion workers are in the informal economy; and ITUC-represented workers constitute a distinct minority of the 1.7 billion workers in the formal economy.[59]

The ITUC explains that its primary mission is the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions. It adheres to the principles of trade union democracy and independence, as set out in its Constitution. At its founding Congress in 2006 the ITUC set out its overall policy framework. Acknowledging the historic role of trade unionism to better the conditions of work and life of working women and men and their families, and to strive for human rights, social justice, gender equality, peace, freedom and democracy, it emphasized the contemporary urgency of labour transnationalism to realize this mission. 'More than ever in its history, confronted by unbridled capitalist globalisation, effective internationalism is essential to the future strength of trade unionism.'

It therefore called on the workers of the world to unite in the ITUC, 'to make of it the instrument needed to call forth a better future for them and for all humanity'.[60] At its Third Congress in 2014 it stated: 'Unions are central to social justice and equality. We must organise in our workplaces and communities to build the power of workers to effect change.' To realize social justice and equality, 'we must also take our Governments back from the iron grip of capital with our political power and change authoritarian regimes by winning the democratic rights of workers'. The ITUC 'as the biggest democratic force on earth' was committed to achieving this through 'unified action'. The ITUC and its affiliated organizations had to act together to promote the ratification and effective implementation of international labour standards, particularly those establishing freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining.[61]

The ITUC is governed by four-yearly world congresses, a General Council and an Executive Bureau. It has close relations with the GUFs and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD, working together through the Global Unions Council, established in January 2007 as 'a tool for structured cooperation and coordination' to facilitate organizing and collective bargaining. The ITUC has regional sections (the ITUC-Asia-Pacific Regional Organisation, the ITUC-African Regional Organisation, the ITUC-Pan European Council, the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas and the Arab Trade Union Confederation) and it cooperates with the longer established ETUC. Like the ICFTU before it, the ITUC is particularly concerned to confront violations by corporations and governments aided by military and police forces against unions and the right of workers to organize collectively. It collaborates with the ILO and maintains contacts with other United Nations (UN) Specialised Agencies. Along with its regional organizations the ITUC has offices in many cities around the world,

including Amman, Geneva, Hong Kong, Lomé, London, Moscow, São Paulo, Sarajevo and Washington.[62]

Since 2008 the ITUC has been organizing the World Day for Decent Work on 7 October each year, a day of mobilization for unions across the globe, with activities in 100 countries, carried out by millions of people.[63] The ITUC also organizes global days of action in response to particular events. For example, on 18 February 2015 it sponsored a global mobilization to defend the right to strike. Employer organizations at the ILO were blocking global mechanisms which ensure respect for the legal recognition of this right under ILO Convention No. 87, which guarantees freedom of association. The ITUC stated that taking away this right would give employers absolute power over workforces and encourage the human rights abuses of countries with feudal or dictatorial employment systems, such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. Unions in over 60 countries organized a range of actions and activities, with support in many cases from politicians, human rights organizations and community groups. ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow announced that workers and their organizations were determined to defend the right to strike – 'this most basic of rights, which is a foundation of democracy' – against concerted moves by radical employer groups to take it away.[64]

The spectacular FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) corruption scandal that broke in May 2015 aided the ITUC's continuing campaign against Qatar's antiquated industrial relations system. The ITUC estimated that 1,200 migrant workers had already died working on FIFA 2022 World Cup construction projects. Burrow, who has regularly visited the migrant workers' camps, pointed out that FIFA had failed to make labour rights a condition of Qatar hosting the World Cup and impoverished workers were paying the price as migrant workers were being worked to death to meet the deadline.[65]

At its Third World Congress in 2014, the ITUC spoke out against 'the punitive and ineffective austerity measures that have done so much damage'. It advocated instead: progressive tax reform; an end to tax havens and corporate tax evasion; long-term investment, such as in infrastructure and social protection; financial reforms that reign in speculation, including a financial transactions tax; and a fight against undeclared work and corruption.[66] Amongst the many other issues upon which it campaigns, high on the list is climate change, which the ITUC insists is a trade union issue. Under the slogan 'No Jobs on a Dead Planet', it promises unions will mobilize to stabilize the world's climate by moving to a zero carbon emission future.[67] ITUC demands put to the world leaders' climate summit in Paris in December 2015 want: the language of 'just transition' put back into the draft agreement; more ambitious emissions reduction targets before 2020; more investment in green jobs; and financial support for the most vulnerable. The Paris agreement, the ITUC stated, had to set the world on track for zero carbon and zero poverty, but without a commitment to 'just transition', workers and their families would pay the price.[68]

Notwithstanding regular displays of worldwide labour solidarity, tensions between unions internationally reflect the varying circumstances of the workers

of the world in the globalization epoch. National labour movements have differing interests and therefore differences with each other that are easily exploited by corporations. These are precisely the problems labour transnationalism aims to overcome. In the meantime, unions in developing countries still have understandable reservations about institutions of labour transnationalism based in Europe that might articulate the interests of unionized workers in the more affluent countries of the world, regardless of ramifications for workers elsewhere.

For example, in December 2012, COSATU and other similarly placed unions accused the European Metal Workers Federation of undermining workers' solidarity and ITUC internal unity by cooperating with European employers in demanding equal market access in developed, emerging and developing countries, during talks over revival of the WTO's Doha round of free-trade negotiations. Unions from the Global South reject the plan due to its deindustrialization effect on developing countries, which would lead to job losses; European unions support it in so far as it opens up new markets for the export of European manufactured goods. Bieler claims that many unions, especially in the Global South, have become disillusioned with the ITUC itself, notwithstanding the enthusiasm with which its founding in 2006 was greeted by labour movements around the world.[69] Indicative of a different kind of disappointment, Waterman criticizes the ITUC of betraying the free and democratic trade unionism for which it claims to stand by 'playing footsie' with the Chinese ACFTU during an ITUC delegation's visit to Beijing in October 2014.[70]

Global Union Federations

A most significant development has been the emergence of GUFs as the international representatives of unions in specific industry or occupational sectors. Previously operating as industry-specific 'trade secretariats' within the ICFTU, in 2000 they adopted the name of Global Union Federations. An individual union will usually belong to a national union centre in its country affiliated to the international peak union body but also affiliated directly to a GUF relevant to the industry where it has members. Unions with members in different industries may affiliate to more than one GUF.[71]

The GUFs assist affiliates in making contacts and launching their campaigns, pursued most effectively in industries with transnational structures. For example, individual hotels may be bound to particular locations and markets, but increasingly are owned by multinational conglomerates. In response to the changing structure of capital, organizing drives in the industry are necessarily conducted best when coordinated internationally by a GUF. Stronger, more unionized sections of the industry have successfully applied industrial pressure in support of unionizing efforts elsewhere, in campaigns directed by a GUF.[72] For example, in 2006 Toyota workers' unions in Japan, Thailand, Australia, South Africa, the UK and elsewhere participated in a global campaign launched by a GUF, the International Metalworkers Federation, for recognition of the Toyota Motor Philippines Corporation Workers Association and reinstatement of fired workers.[73]

A primary aim of the GUFs is to establish formal mechanisms of engagement with transnational corporations by quasi-legal devices known as an International Framework Agreement or Global Framework Agreement (GFA): an agreed set of principles relating to employment terms and working conditions and how industrial relations within a specific corporation should be conducted. Ideally, they seek to commit corporations to accept everywhere the highest labour standards prevailing in their enterprises, usually those in their home location. By 2002 there were 20; by 2006 there were 55 GFAs with transnational corporations that submitted to Global Unions' efforts to establish regimes of transnational collective bargaining; but few were with US-based corporations, which are notoriously hostile.[74]

GFAs force major corporations to play by union rules in entire industries; and display to workers around the globe the advantages of transnational collective action. In South Africa, a union organizer in the security industry describes the significance of the GFA in his hand: 'It's like a bible, man. When management tells me to get out, I show them this. When workers are afraid to join, I show them this. When people tell me we don't have the right, I point to this.'[75] Jamie McCallum argues that labour internationalism has developed to the point where workers' organizations can change the rules of global engagement. By exercising power in the absence of an overarching political authority, global unions are becoming 'agents of governance'.[76] Following recent amalgamations, GUFs currently number nine.

The Building and Woodworkers International (BWI), based in Switzerland, covers workers in the building, building materials, wood, forestry and related areas of work. In February 2014 it had 317 national affiliates: 77 in Africa and the Middle East, 75 in Asia, 113 in Europe, seven in North America and 44 in Latin America and the Caribbean. With millions of child-workers labouring in construction, BWI promotes practical solutions through schooling, campaigning and organizing. In India, for example, the BWI campaign 'Children Should Learn Not Earn!' has set up schools for child-workers, pulling thousands out of building sites and getting them into the classroom. The BWI Gender Empowerment Programme has trained thousands of women workers in union work to combat low pay and dangerous work in construction and wood and forestry.[77]

Health and safety is a key concern. With 100,000 or so workers dying every year from asbestos-related diseases, BWI-affiliated unions are campaigning for a global ban on asbestos. Workers in BWI sectors have elevated risk of developing various cancers due to occupational exposure, so BWI along with other Global Unions has launched the first-ever international zero occupational cancer campaign. The BWI has succeeded in having ILO core labour standards included in systems for certification of wood and forestry production. In Africa this has helped unions fight poverty through sustainable forestry and better working conditions. It lobbied the World Bank to include ILO core labour standards as mandatory to procurement policies. In May 2005 mandatory clauses on forced labour, child labour, non-discrimination and other labour standards were added to World Bank construction contracts; in May 2006 the private sector wing of the Bank required its clients to respect core labour standards.[78]

The BWI conducts a 'Campaign for Decent Work. Towards and Beyond 2014'. For the FIFA World Cup in 2014, the BWI secured cooperation from several competing Brazilian union confederations, each with construction unions affiliated. Standing over and above national-level union divisions, the BWI's international intervention helped achieve a common and coherent campaign. This has now morphed into a campaign for the 2016 Olympics, with the BWI organizing 20 Brazilian unions to develop a joint strategy 'to improve health and safety at the workplace, to maximize job creation in Brazil for the production of furniture for the Olympics, to reduce the wage gap between different regions and improve working and living conditions'.[79] There are many other instances in which GUFs play a bridging and brokering role.

Education International (EI) is the GUF for teachers from pre-school to university levels, and other education workers. In February 2014 it had 30 million members in 394 member organizations in 171 countries and territories; more than half are women. Its triennial world congresses bring together over a thousand delegates; and regional conferences meet between congresses. Committed to promote the right to education for all persons in the world, without discrimination, it aims: to pursue the establishment and protection of open, publicly funded and controlled educational systems, and academic and cultural institutions, aimed at the democratic, social, cultural and economic development of society and the preparation of every citizen for active and responsible participation in society; and to promote the political, social and economic conditions that are required for the realization of the right to education in all nations, for the achievement of equal educational opportunities for all, for the expansion of public education services and for the improvement of their quality. In addition to advocacy, EI promotes solidarity between members in developed and developing countries through programmes to develop union capacity to work for education for all in countries where such endeavours are most needed. Noting that teacher union leaders are often targeted by governments or armed groups in countries such as Nepal, Columbia and Ethiopia, it engages in global advocacy of human and trade union rights and, when leaders are attacked or imprisoned or member unions repressed, it launches Urgent Aid Appeals and its affiliates respond with waves of protests to the governments concerned.[80]

The International Arts and Entertainment Alliance (IAEA), the GUF representing workers in arts and entertainment, comprises three global federations: the International Federation of Actors, based in London; the International Federation of Musicians, based in Paris; and a Media, Entertainment and Arts division, based in Nyon in Switzerland.[81] The International Federation of Actors, founded in 1952, represents hundreds of thousands of performers with some 90 member organizations in more than 60 countries. It aims to improve the working conditions and advance the economic and social rights of performers, but also to campaign for the value of the cultural and creative sector in which they work.[82] The International Federation of Musicians, founded in 1948, is the international organization for musicians' unions, guilds and professional associations and now has about 70 affiliates in 60 countries, and regional groups for Africa, South

America and Europe. The Federation's main objective is to protect and further the economic, social and artistic interests of musicians represented by its member unions.[83] For instance, in 2014 the IAEA campaigned against the Rome Opera Board decision to terminate the contracts of orchestra musicians and choir and outsource their employment, a move deemed 'short-sighted, totally inappropriate from a management and labour point of view and extremely dangerous from an artistic perspective'.[84]

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) describes itself as 'the global voice of journalists'. With origins dating back to 1926, it represents more than 550,000 journalists in 150 national unions covering 119 countries. It insists that the professional rights of journalists can only be defended when there are independent, vigorous and representative unions for journalists. It draws connections between journalists' rights and the public interest – and the danger posed by too-powerful global media corporations. 'The IFJ is closely associated with campaigns at national, regional and global level to improve levels of media pluralism and to counter the threat to democratic rights and secure working conditions posed by excessive media concentration.' A primary concern for the IFJ is the safety and security of journalists and media staff and, with media employers, it founded the International News Safety Institute to improve protection for journalists and media staff.[85]

IndustriALL, with around 800 affiliated national unions, represents 50 million workers in 140 countries employed in extraction of oil and gas, mining, generation and distribution of electric power, manufacturing of metals and metal products, shipbuilding, automotive, aerospace, mechanical engineering, electronics, chemicals, rubber, pulp and paper, building materials, textiles, garments, leather and footwear and environmental services. Founded on 19 June 2012 it brings together affiliates of three former GUFs: the International Metalworkers' Federation; the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions; and the International Textiles Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. IndustriALL claims it 'challenges the power of multinational companies and negotiates with them on a global level'. It strives to build stronger unions, organize and increase union membership, fight for trade union rights, fight against precarious work (including contract and agency labour), build union power to confront global capital, promote industrial policy and sustainability, promote social justice, ensure equal rights and women's participation, create safe workplaces, and improve democracy and inclusiveness.[86] On the World Day for Decent Work, 7 October 2014, IndustriALL called on affiliates to mobilize their members and join the global fight to STOP Precarious Work; and it listed the significant number of actions these unions had already taken during 2014.[87]

Transport workers have long had a strategic position within the world capitalist economy and within the world labour movement.[88] The International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) claims it is based on international solidarity since it was founded in 1896, following cooperation between Dutch and British maritime unions during a strike. It is now a federation of 681 transport worker unions in 148 countries, representing 4,500,000 transport workers, that 'uses its

industrially-based structures to build the union strengths of port workers, seafarers, aviation workers, road transport and railway workers'.[89] Its intense involvement in support of Korean railway workers' strike action against railway privatization is described in Chapter 8.

The ITF's 60-year-old Flag of Convenience (FOC) campaign supports the rights of seafarers in what it describes as 'the world's oldest globalized industry'. It targeted FOC vessels: ships registered in certain countries to permit lower wages and worse working conditions than elsewhere. In 2003 its maritime unions negotiated the first-ever internationally bargained, worldwide collective agreement in the industry. Under this Standard Collective Agreement, seafarers now have negotiated global wage minima, enforced by ITF inspectors, who have in the process also provided seafarers with millions of dollars of back pay.[90] The ITF's FOC campaign successfully brought workers together transnationally, bridged the divide between developed and developing countries and changed the structure of the labour market for merchant seamen.[91] As Nathan Lillie observes, it was natural for maritime unions, like all unions, to seek to expand their influence to match the geographic extent of the product market in which they compete.[92]

In road and rail transport as well as in ports and airports, the ITF deals with transnational corporations and develops policies 'to build industrial muscle' in the booming logistics sector, where changing employment structures demand close examination of the age and gender profiles of the workforce. 'Led by its affiliated unions, today's ITF is responding to globalization with a planned approach to organizing along global transport and supply chains, coupled with strategic campaigns to ensure transport workers' rights are respected the world over.'[93] Mac Urata describes the Global Action Days to establish and enforce acceptable limitations on lorry drivers' duty time and rest periods. With the slogan 'Fatigue Kills', participation has grown steadily since 1997 and by 2001 involved unions in 62 countries. This campaign has achieved improved legislation and regulations, better agreements with employers in many countries, including Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Lithuania, Honduras, Ethiopia, Nepal, Thailand, Chile, Luxembourg, Paraguay, Bangladesh and Bulgaria. It has increased public awareness everywhere that accidents are caused by intolerable working conditions and time pressures.[94]

The ITF has also, like other GUFs, turned its attention to organizing precariously employed workers, because companies were replacing full-time workers with temporary, part-time, agency and on-call workers 'at a frightening rate'; and governments were bringing in legislation making it easier for companies to rely on precarious rather than stable and secure forms of employment.[95] In addition to its standard organizing manual, in January 2014 it issued a guide specifically to help its affiliates reach out to precarious workers, how to be as inclusive of them as possible, and how, when and whether to work with NGOs on the issue; it is available in English, Arabic, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Turkish. 'We all have a duty to promote the lives of precarious workers', says Malawi Transport and General Workers Union official Martin Kapombeza.[96] The ITF also hosts an 'informal workers blog', full of news updates, resources,

links and other information about organizing informal workers. For example, Souley Zeinabou Habou Barba of the National Union of Informal Economy Workers in Niger posted news about the recruitment of 400 female informal transport workers in bus stations and the aims to recruit more. 'This is a work in progress. Organising female transport workers in the context of precarious employment where workers' rights are not respected, is crucial to the fight of the ITF.'[97]

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF), based in Geneva, represents workers employed in agriculture and plantations; the preparation and manufacture of food and beverages; hotels, restaurants and catering services; all stages of tobacco processing. The IUF comprises 402 affiliated organizations in 126 countries representing a combined representational membership of over 12 million workers (including a financial membership of 2.6 million). It explains all workers in IUF sectors are affected by globalization 'driven by the transnational companies which increasingly dominate world production, trade and investment and set the international social and political agenda'. It seeks to create 'an international union counterweight' to the power of transnational corporations. 'We fight for union recognition at every level, including international level.' It has won international agreements on global respect for union rights with leading companies within IUF sectors and works continually to extend these agreements to other corporations. 'In today's global economy our goal must be internationally negotiated rights and standards within global companies.' Its guiding principle is international labour solidarity, implemented through: building solidarity at every stage of the food chain; international organizing within transnational companies and global action to defend human, democratic, and trade union rights. It strengthens member unions through: assisting affiliates in organizing drives and in conflicts with employers and governments; coordinating and implementing solidarity and support actions; sector-wide organizing; research and publications; promoting women's equality in the workplace, society and the union movement; and union education programs to help build the strength and independence of affiliates.

> The IUF gives active support to movements everywhere struggling against oppression. We respond internationally to every attack on our affiliates and on the labour movement. We are committed to building alliances with human rights, environmental, consumer and other organizations in civil society who share our objectives.[98]

Public Services International (PSI) brings together more than 20 million public-sector workers, two-thirds of whom are women, who work in social services, health care, municipal and community services, central government, and public utilities such as water and electricity. It has 669 affiliated unions in 154 countries and territories.[99] With the public sector very much under attack, it campaigns for social and economic justice, and 'efficient, accessible public services

around the world'.[100] In cooperation with other global unions, PSI has launched the 'Quality Public Services – Action Now! campaign', which unites public- and private-sector unions, municipal governments and civil-society groups in advancing good-quality public services as the best means of building equitable, sustainable, peaceful and democratic societies. It argues that investment in public services backed by fair taxation policies is a key solution to economic problems.[101] It argues that privatization is 'a dangerous trend that must be reversed', because good-quality public services are the foundation of democratic societies and successful economies. 'They ensure that everyone has equal access to vital services, including health care, education, electricity, clean water and sanitation. When these services are privatised, maximizing corporate profits replaces the public interest as the driving force.'[102]

PSI-affiliates represent workers in the frontline of efforts to tackle violence against women, which PSI states exists in all countries and in all societies, in private and public places, in physical as well as virtual spaces, driven by deep-seated beliefs that a woman is not equal to a man. 'PSI and our affiliates can work together and with civil society organisations to break the silence and mobilise against discrimination and violence in our workplaces and societies.'[103]

Union Network International – 'a global union for skills and services workers' – has 20 million workers in 900 unions in over 140 countries. It claims it 'fosters international solidarity and provides a voice at the international level for all its members', whose jobs range from night-janitor in an office-block to big-time Hollywood director.[104] It points out that workers in UNI sectors throughout the world 'are being exposed to the harsh realities of globalization' and describes the deteriorating 'new work realities' faced by workers everywhere.[105] In countries where union organizing and bargaining rights are not enshrined in law, UNI joins the fight to get them on the books; where these laws do exist, UNI works with unions, the ILO and others to ensure they are enforced. 'UNI also works in developing countries to build trade unions where there are none and to offer training and capacity building to its members.'[106]

Well placed to exploit IT for mobilization, UNI has used its high-tech abilities to campaign in many countries at once to confront transnational corporations. Its website states: 'With today's technology, it is difficult for a company to hide. If global companies exploit workers in one part of the world, the news can reach almost immediately a huge worldwide audience through the global union and the internet.' It warns that UNI's pledge to answer calls for solidarity action within 24 hours will take on a new meaning with a global union mobilization. 'If the companies mobilize more and more finance, UNI Global Union's response must be to mobilize more and more people.'[107]

Like other GUFs, UNI focuses on achieving GFAs, which simultaneously defend workers in developed countries while advancing labour standards and workers' rights in developing countries.[108] IT workers and call-centre workers, whom UNI represents, are especially affected by what it describes as the 'global mobility revolution', the trend for service-sector jobs to be offshored away from higher-cost areas to those where workers' wages, conditions and rights are

worse. Its 2004 report on this 'bleak picture' argued there were opportunities for unions to turn potentially difficult circumstances to advantage, but stressed that 'a successful approach involves responding *internationally*, with trade unions engaging actively at *both ends* of the work migration trajectory'. This was because decent, properly paid jobs in one country are best defended in the context where unions are working for decent, properly paid jobs globally. 'Put another way, a strong sense of internationalism is not only a good trade union principle but is now increasingly an effective pragmatic response as well.'[109] UNI's response to offshoring and outsourcing, which affect jobs from the lowest to the highest skilled, is persistently internationalist, because 'it would be dangerous to respond to employer initiatives to relocate work to other countries with arguments that could be misconstrued as xenophobic or protectionist'. Since the aim is to ensure job security and compliance with decent labour standards, as companies act globally unions must act together across the world to limit the costs globalization imposes on societies in both the source and destination countries.[110]

An example of putting principle into practice was UNI's campaign to assist call-centre workers in India to form the Union of Information Technology Enabled Services Professionals, achieved in September 2005, to start the hard work of organizing India's rapidly expanding 'business process outsourcing' workforce. UNI-affiliated UK unions representing call-centre workers, directly affected by offshoring to India, supported the Indian unionizing efforts. They directed their campaigns in the UK against the companies rather than the competitive threat posed by Indian workers, and developed the important and principled argument that Indians had a right to employment on good terms and that there was no contradiction between fighting to defend jobs in the UK and adopting an internationalist stance.[111] As banking union general-secretary Ed Sweeney stated on 17 July 2003: 'This is not a campaign for British jobs for British workers, the situation is much more sophisticated than that, and in any event the UK is a net importer of jobs, so any xenophobic rhetoric is totally inappropriate.'[112]

The *potential* power of call-centre workers has similarities with automobile workers in a JIT production chain. Phil Taylor and Peter Bain point out that, given the immediacy of required response to customer demand, any significant interruption to servicing flows at one or more sites, wherever they are located, could have profound organization-wide consequences. The simultaneity of call-centre servicing networks makes them particularly vulnerable to disruption through worker action. 'Any significant interruption to these inextricably connected servicing flows could have an immediate impact on revenue, recalling the aphorism that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.' The crucial issue is the gap between the workers' *objective* potential power and their *subjective* ability, or willingness, to exercise it.[113] UNI works to close that gap.

When unions in developed countries first started to form at national levels in the nineteenth century, they tended to be exclusionary; they mostly represented skilled, white, male workers in full-time employment rather than those more

disadvantaged within the labour market, such as the semi-skilled and unskilled, the non-white, the female and the casually employed. In due course more disadvantaged workers formed unions, but were not always welcomed by established unions whose craft-consciousness occasionally exceeded wider class-consciousness. Notwithstanding exemplary inclusive rhetoric, are Global Unions exclusionary on a global plane, at least by default? Is the subject of contemporary labour transnationalism only the worker already represented in national trade union structures and now in Global Unions, which are based on affiliations of existing national unions? How can the labour transnationalism practised by Global Unions fully encompass the precariously employed and those marginalized from national trade union structures? There are many examples of transnational solidarity and organizing efforts to aid more vulnerable workers around the world, as we have seen. There are real achievements to acknowledge in this respect. At the same time there are issues of presentation and representation to ponder. Struggles of marginalized workers must belong to them. Transnational solidarity on the part of unionized workers in the developed world is important, but is there a danger such support might also be flaunted to flatter the highest-level officialdom of labour transnationalism?

The Global Unions project is not an uncomplicated risk-free exercise devoid of dangers such as Eurocentrism, bureaucracy and organizational imperatives trumping principle. Labour transnationalism, including Global Unions, is nonetheless a creative and appropriate response to globalization. The potential of the labour movement for truly international organizing capacity is much closer to realization now than when Marx so optimistically called upon the workers of the world to unite. No idea in human history, as Alan Howard remarked in his study of Global Unions, is more powerful or more useful in the ideological warfare of the twenty-first century than the idea of solidarity: 'that across the divides of nation and language, of regions, races, and religions, ordinary working people are responsible for each other. It is the oxygen of any organizing campaign that truly lives and breathes, whether that campaign takes place in Dhaka or Detroit'. Strategy and structure are sterile without the fervour and moral force of solidarity. Yet solidarity to be effective also requires strategies and structures and commitment of resources to organize tens of millions of workers around the world.[114] Global Unions provide strategies, structures and commitment of resources.

The workers of the world are undoubtedly a transnational class-in-itself. However, as William Robinson has sagely noted, 'this emerging global proletariat is not yet a class-for-itself; that is, it has not necessarily developed a consciousness of itself as a class, or organized itself as such'. Bieler argues that whether different labour movements engage in relations of transnational solidarity is not pre-determined by the structuring conditions of the capitalist social relations of production, but ultimately depends on the outcome of class struggle.[115] Crucial in the struggles that will help in the making of the international working class are those that show solidarity against discrimination, the subject of the next chapter.

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6 Confounding workforce fragmentation

> The capitalist buys with the same capital a greater mass of labour-power, as he progressively replaces skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.
>
> (Karl Marx, *Capital. A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production*, vol. 1, London: Geoge Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1949, pp. 649–50)

Discrimination and globalization

The tendency of capitalists to take advantage of workers rendered vulnerable by their subordinated identities is pronounced in the globalizing period. Workforces have become even more heterogeneous as globalization draws into waged labour people previously engaged in other forms of production, such as farming or unpaid domestic labour, and encourages migration within and between nations. By 1995 the World Bank conceded that market forces were exacerbating inequalities between men and women, and between ethnic and racial groups.[1] In 2014 Oxfam stressed that economic inequality was compounding other inequalities.[2] The spread and intensification of market relations has not only increased inequality between classes; it has also increased inequality *within* the working class. Notwithstanding significant improvements in the circumstances of more advantaged women and non-white people, divisions within the working class based on ancient prejudices about gender and race/ethnicity have deepened rather than diminished.

For example, some women enjoy highly paid employment, but women are nonetheless over-represented in low-paid and precariously employed labour. According to the ITUC in 2014: women make up 40 per cent of the global paid workforce but females are the majority of the 50 per cent of workers who are in vulnerable or irregular forms of employment; unemployment is higher among women than men; and less than 15 per cent of union leaders are female.[3] In employment generally and especially in the EPZs of the world, women disproportionately occupy the lowest-paid positions and are also subjected to violence, sexual harassment and bullying.[4] Women are handicapped by the extent of their unpaid work and sexist assumptions about their abilities and rights to paid employment. Employers capitalize upon women's weaker position in the labour

market to pay most women less than men performing equivalent work and impede women's chances of better forms of employment. While this has always been the case, globalization has brought dramatically higher proportions of women into paid employment, where they are as systematically undervalued as they have been in unpaid employment.

The autonomist Marxist understanding of the connection between class exploitation and racial and gender-based forms of domination is that, although commodification can reduce prejudice, as Marx and Engels predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*, the capitalist international division of labour often incorporates and depends on discrimination by gender or race/ethnicity to establish its hierarchies of control.[5] Fragmentation of the labour market along such lines is an important weapon for corporations in the globalizing period; relocation of plant to cheaper wage economies is part of this offensive. 'Policies aimed at segmenting the labour market', as Negri emphasizes, 'tend to produce a balkanisation of the labour market, and above all, important new effects of marginalisation'. Capital attacks labour through corporatization or ghettoization. 'This means a system of wage hierarchies, based on either simulated *participation* in development and/or on *regimentation* within development, and, on the other hand, marginalisation and isolation.'[6]

However, ancient prejudices, though they remain powerful and potent, do not act as the main organizing principle for the worldwide production and distribution of goods. Capitalism perceives and processes the world solely as an array of economic factors. This reductionism of capital now has 'a totalizing grip on the planet', according to Dyer-Witheford:

> Other dominations, too, are reductive – sexism reduces women to objects for men, racism negates the humanity of people of color. But neither patriarchy nor racism has succeeded in knitting the planet together into an integrated, coordinated system of interdependencies. This is what capital is doing today, as, with the aid of new technologies, it globally maps the availability of female labor, ethno-markets, migrancy flows, human gene pools, and entire animal, plant, and insect species onto its coordinates of value.
>
> In doing so, it is subsuming every other form of oppression to its logic.… Patriarchal and racist logics are older than capital, mobilize fears and hatreds beyond its utilitarian economic understanding, and are virulently active today. But they are now compelled to manifest themselves within and mediated through capital's larger, overarching structure of domination … because of society's subordination to a system that compels key issues of sexuality, race, and nature to revolve around a hub of profit.[7]

The benefits for capitalists of workforce fragmentation are multiplied if, in addition to greater amounts of surplus value extracted from vulnerable labour, workforces are hampered in presenting collectivist responses by virtue of such internal divisions.

The problem of prejudice: the case of immigrant labour

Prejudice does not prevent migration, but it greatly weakens the ability of migrants to participate in labour markets without suffering various forms of discrimination that impede activism to improve pay and conditions. For example, on 21 March 2005, the annual Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) expressed its regret that systemic racism was taking increasingly diversified forms, such as racial profiling, non-recognition of acquired skills and discriminatory hiring practices. 'As union members, we have a responsibility to say "NO" to racism in all its forms.' It noted that few migrants could work in their area of expertise as soon as they arrived. 'Ask your brothers and sisters of colour; they'll tell you what they have to go through: exams, waiting periods, interviews, upgrading courses, recognition by specialized organizations, etc.' The CUPW resolved to lobby governments 'to recognize acquired skills, educational knowledge and accreditation of immigrants, upon their arrival, to foster their immediate inclusion into the workforce'.[8]

The CUPW, like many unions around the world, has been an active campaigner against racial discrimination. However, if workers' organizations replicate the prejudices of society and discourage collective organization of all workers regardless of their identities, the benefits to employers of discrimination are multiplied: the marginalized workers are easier to exploit; and their superexploitation threatens the wages and conditions of less exploited workers.

The USA is the largest recipient of migrant labour in the world, overwhelmingly non-white. Immanuel Ness has shown how US business leaders, actively creating a myth of labour shortage for substandard or scarce skilled jobs, use migrant labour to lower labour costs and increase profits, while decreasing jobs for American workers and undermining organized labour. In general, Ness argues, worker migration and guest-worker programmes weaken the power of labour in both sending and receiving countries. Rejecting the notion that workers enthusiastically migrate for low-paying jobs, he details the way organized labour in the USA must protect the interests of both American and migrant workers.[9] This is a vital task for each and every labour movement, one not always undertaken, as the following examples reveal.

From 17–25 July 2009 about 50 Chinese construction workers staged a continuous protest in front of the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, where they had been employed since March. They had not received any wages since April, so in June they stopped working. In July the Polish employer fired them and evicted them from their hostel. Determined to remain visible to Chinese embassy staff and the Polish public, they refused offers from charities to house them. Anarchist activists supporting them organized a rally on 25 July outside the main contractor's office, aiming to inform potential customers about its employment record. In the meantime, the Chinese embassy arranged to fly the workers back to China, promising they would receive their back-pay within two months. It is unclear whether they did receive their wages, but the dispute showed Chinese construction workers

using tactics from struggles in China: staying together as one group, asking authorities to intervene on their behalf, staging open protest on the street and using media to increase the pressure.[10]

Asian workers in Poland are regularly cheated of wages and deducted excessive amounts for accommodation. Always they are paid less than locals. For instance, in January 2009 Filipino welders and mechanics at a factory in Poznan were paid 600 zloty (they had been promised 700) while equivalent Polish workers earned at least 2,000 zloty. Even with the best will in the world, it can be difficult for local unionists to integrate migrant workers, who are often highly mobile and do not speak the local language. In the apparent absence of labour movement involvement, the anarchists who assisted the Chinese construction workers worried that their support, as activists external to the workplace, produced an image of such workers as victims who were in too weak a position to win their own struggles.[11]

Unfortunately, unions do not always endeavour to integrate migrant workers. In the Czech Republic at two Foxconn factories, for example, the union is only concerned with core employees, compromising its role in workplace representation. Of the 4,500 people working at the Pardubice factory and the 2,500 in Kutna Hora, around 40 per cent of these are temporary workers hired through agencies, mostly migrants, some of whom will soon go back home or move to another job. Rutvica Andrijasevic and Devi Sacchetto maintain the union's neglect of the temporary workers means the multinational workforce in the factories has not bonded and often divides along ethnic lines. With only 300 members in Pardubice and less than 100 in Kutna Hora, union representative Marius justifies the union's position because of the problem of high turnover. 'We don't have access to the migrant workers, not least because they don't speak Czech … we don't deal with residence permits because one of Foxconn's workers is in charge of these bureaucratic procedures.' Yet the union office is next door to the major recruitment agency, Xawax, while temporary workers' complaints are being handled by NGOs set up to support migrant workers. The exclusion of temporary migrants from union representation makes the future role of the unions uncertain because, as a recently sacked ex-employee explains: 'In the end there were only temporary workers on the production line.' The vulnerability of migrant workers as they replace unionized labour is symptomatic of a trend occurring throughout Europe.[12]

Obviously, equal inclusion in local unions is the best means to reduce migrant workers' vulnerability and protect the wages and conditions of both local and migrant workers. It also protects unions as institutions from declining into irrelevance, as the Czech Republic example intimated; migrant workers tend not to endure endlessly their super-exploitation, so if existing unions will not support them, the vacuum is filled by other forces, such as anarchists from outside or new workplace-based networks. 'The globalizing powers have a long reach and endless patience', Linebaugh and Rediker remind us. 'Yet the planetary wanderers do not forget, and they are ever ready from Africa to the Caribbean to Seattle to resist slavery and restore the commons.'[13]

Even in the worst possible circumstances, such as the Middle East, migrant workers today are mobilizing. A recent issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* reveals a transnational labour force in the Middle East is contesting its exploitation through novel forms of association and industrial attack that are prompting defensive responses on the part of capital: transformations in the mode and relations of production.[14] For instance, in October–November 2007, Burj Dubai immigrant construction workers went on strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions. Despite 400 arrests, they won a 20 per cent wage increase.[15]

In some jurisdictions, Qatar for example, it is legally impossible for local unions to recruit migrant workers, who are denied citizenship rights. Even where there are no such restrictions, effective integration of migrant workers in local unions is impaired if there is prejudice towards them. At the same time as Asian workers are moving to Poland, Polish workers are flocking westward. The response of many people in the UK to the arrival in the past decade of many thousands of Polish immigrants has been less than welcoming, as the rise of the UK Independence Party illustrates. British unions abjure anti-Polish sentiment; but prejudice always remains potentially a powerful force working against solidaristic responses. The danger of racial/ethnic divisions fragmenting the labour movement is heightened by controversies around immigration in many countries that encourage racialized victim-blaming of immigrant workers. Jane Hardy's study of union involvement with migrants in Europe shows that right-wing extremism is encouraging perceptions of competition among workers, making it all the more difficult for unions to perform a solidaristic role.[16]

The staunch commitment of neoliberals to the free market falters in relation to labour and international migration. One of the glaring hypocrisies of our time is that, while capital enjoys unprecedented freedom to cross national boundaries, labour faces severe practical and political restrictions on its movement in response to market forces. Corporations take full advantage of the fact that capital is nowadays highly mobile while labour is not. In 2000 the IMF acknowledged that workers moving from one country to another to find better employment were impeded by the numerous barriers to migration from developing to developed countries.[17] More people than ever before are moving throughout the world, so states are enacting even tougher border control and immigration laws at the same time as barriers to capital flows have been significantly reduced or completely abandoned.

In 2014, the ITUC calculated that 90 per cent of the world's 230 million migrants left home in search of work.[18] The numbers of people wishing to migrate are far in excess of places officially available in developed countries' quotas, creating a huge industry of irregular forms of movement. Lesser skilled migrants disproportionately figure amongst those who fail to reach safety. Between 2000 and 2014, 40,000 migrants died on terrestrial and maritime migratory routes, 22,000 of them in the Mediterranean Sea; and thousands are still missing. On 18 December 2014 the Fourth Global Day of Action for the Rights of Migrants, Refugees and Displaced People denounced the 'ongoing war

against migrants' conducted by the countries of the North with the complicity of the governments of the South. 'We demand TRUTH AND JUSTICE for the migrants dead and lost along the migratory routes of the planet. We want a world where human beings can circulate freely and choose the place to live.'[19]

So corporations globetrot at the whim of profitability, while workers migrating in response to labour-market forces are frequently obstructed then vilified if they are lucky enough to arrive in a better place. The obvious incentives to migrate share as their primary cause the increasing division in the world between rich and poor, engendered by the neoliberal globalization that insists upon the right of capital alone to move without impediment. The problems prompting migration – poverty, war, persecution and environmental degradation – have been exacerbated by unfair free-trade regimes and neoliberal policies generally. The rights of capital, yet again, take precedence over the urgent needs of humanity. The contrasting constraints on the rights of people to live and work where they wish are not merely the physical ones of detention camps and the legalistic ones of visas etc. Increasingly, these constraints are also ideological ones in the form of racial/ethnic prejudice in host societies. Capital benefits from a degree of labour mobility, so long as it remains much less mobile than capital and especially when prejudice can be utilized to divide workers at the point of production and in societies more broadly.

Right-wing parties generally profess one variant or another of a fusion of economic liberalism and social conservatism. Some right-wing political leaders argue explicitly that the imposition of a socially conservative framework is a necessary compensation for a socially fragmenting free-market economy.[20] In this sense, economic liberalism and social conservatism, philosophical contradiction notwithstanding, are politically symbiotic. Social conservatism is positively useful to those managing national economies in the interests of the wealthiest as they preside over declining wages and conditions, decreased social welfare and increased unemployment and precarity. Encouraging those adversely affected, such as the least educated and skilled, to blame the racial/ethnic 'other', deflects political criticism of neoliberal policies. Increasingly, not just right-wing parties, but most parties contending for government are reluctant to appear 'soft' on immigration, afraid to point out the benefits immigrants bring to a society and that the numbers are less than the popular perception. Racial/ethnic and religious tensions are heightened as politicians pander to xenophobia, creating what a UN official describes as a 'toxic backdrop' that leads to attacks on migrants.[21]

Notwithstanding pretences to universalism and globalism, capitalism continually plays people off against each other. Corporate globalization, according to anti-capitalist protesters, 'is one where boundaries and divisions are used against us to keep us segmented, repressed and fighting among ourselves'.[22] For Negri, the transition from welfare state in the Keynesian post-war boom period to 'warfare state' in the neoliberal globalizing period was consistent with the ideology of poverty and divisiveness that capital began promoting within the working class. This was 'deliberately planned by the ruling powers', because a large number of poor people obstructs proletarian solidarity and 'gives rise to the

vicious blackmail represented by the unconcealed manifestation of widespread misery – i.e. to the obfuscation of the imagination, the reawakening of atavic fears and the encouragement of monstrous piety'.[23] Desperation for any wage rate, racism and religiosity would work together to rupture working-class unity against capital. Globalization engenders and encourages reactionary responses that blame its other victims rather than its perpetrators.

Labour and new social movements: the 'circulation of struggles'

Nancy Fraser has termed such victim-blaming 'the problem of reification'. She argues that 'identity politics' contributed to this problem. Struggles for the 'recognition of difference', which assumed the guise of 'identity politics' from the 1980s, seemed charged with emancipatory promise that was not realized, because the emphasis on identity, or recognition, displaced emphasis on redistribution of resources that originally informed the agenda of new social movements such as feminism. The move from *redistribution* to *recognition* in the language of political claims-making occurred at a time when an aggressively expanding capitalism was radically exacerbating inequality. 'In this context, questions of recognition are serving less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistributive struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them.' Insofar as the politics of recognition displaces the politics of redistribution, Fraser alleges it may actually promote economic inequality.[24]

In 1980 Negri warned of the potential for new social movement aspirations to become reshaped and manipulated by capital, leading to the collapse of possibilities of reconstructing particular subjectivities as links in any general material project.[25] In *Empire* Hardt and Negri suggest that those who advocate 'a politics of difference, fluidity and hybridity' have been outflanked by the strategies of power, because corporate power thrives on commodifying difference. Despite the best intentions, the postmodern politics of difference is not only ineffective against, but can coincide with and support, the functions and practices of globalizing capitalism.[26] At the same time, according to Fraser, the politics of recognition discourages respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts and encourages separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism: the problem of reification. Thus the results of identity politics tend to be doubly unfortunate: 'in many cases, struggles for recognition simultaneously displace struggle for economic justice and promote repressive forms of communitarianism'.[27]

Recognition of disadvantaged groups was badly served by emphasis on identity alone. Displacement of the politics of redistribution entirely by the politics of recognition renders economically privileged proponents of identity politics, such as liberal intellectuals, vulnerable to criticism from working-class people. This makes it easier for right-wing intellectuals to seize the abandoned tools of classed rhetoric to argue working people are hurting because of policies enacted by 'politically correct' elites.[28] Thus progressive advocates incur the wrath of workers and

cede intellectual ground to culture warriors whenever their politics of recognition is not accompanied by an equally determined politics of redistribution, to critique and oppose increasing class polarization and economic inequalities.

As identity politics developed in the 1980s and 1990s out of the new social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, it differentiated itself from its radical precursors in its denigration of working-class politics and the labour movement. It did not have to be like that. When the new social movements first appeared in the 1960s and early 1970s, it was assumed that the labour movement, as a significant force for progressive change, would work in concert with these movements; working-class interests and new social movement concerns were seen to be complementary rather than conflicting. All were regarded as radical forces aiming to restrain the power of capitalism to: exploit workers; super-exploit non-white, female and child workers; destroy the environment; fight imperialist wars; encourage homophobia and subordinate women. In 1975, Serge Mallett wrote about 'a new working class' characterized not only by the best traditions of militancy but by the best innovations in values.[29]

However, the assumed complementarity of labour and new social movement aims dissipated. Articulating positions developed during the late 1970s within the new social movements, by the 1980s new social movement theory was arguing the new movements had replaced the 'old' movement of labour as the principal force for social change. The term 'new' was not simply in temporal opposition to 'old'; it contained a value judgement. New social movement theorists suggested the labour movement was outmoded, left behind by the changing circumstances of society and new forces within society; in 'postindustrial' society the labour movement was no longer the dynamic social force it had once been. There was a strong implication that the labour movement represented an inferior, obsolete form of political mobilization, because its concerns were focused on economic deprivation and overlooked the significance of social divisions based on gender, sexuality, race or ethnicity. Not only were the labour movement's days as important medium for social change over but the labour movement and the new social movements were not necessarily even on the same side, because conflicting priorities brought them into conflict with each other.[30]

New social movement theory pointed to real problems of incorporation and conservatism in labour movement institutions and responses. However, globalization made a mockery of its substantive content. Dyer-Witheford argues that any belief that new social movements marked a transition away from the 'old' struggle over economic inequality had to crumble away in the face of neoliberalism's doctrinaire reaffirmation of the market, attack on the welfare state and unconstrained expansions of commodity exchange. In its refusal to acknowledge the full depth of capitalism's penetration of the planet and its dismissal of the Marxian tradition that has consistently applied itself to this issue, identity politics was an aspect of the failure to recognize and respond to this crisis:

> Capital is a system inimical not only to movements for higher wages, more free time, or better working conditions – classic labor movement objectives

> – but also to movements for equality-in-difference, peace, and the preservation of nature. This is not because it creates racism, sexism, militarism, or ecological despoliation, phenomena whose existence handsomely predates its appearance, but rather because it treats them only as opportunities for or impediments to accumulation. Because capital's *a priori* is profit (its own expanded replication), its logic in regard to the emancipation of women, racial justice, or the preservation of the environment is purely instrumental. The prevention of male violence toward women, the saving of rain forests, or the eradication of racism is a matter of bottom line calculus: tolerated or even benignly supported when costless, enthusiastically promoted when profitable, but ruthlessly opposed as soon as they demand any substantial diversion of social surplus. Hence capitalism is antithetical to any movements for whom these goals are affirmed as fundamental, indispensable values.[31]

As unbridled capitalism revealed its true nature, Negri anticipated increasing intersection between labour and new social movement struggles that would prove the conventional division between 'old' class politics and 'new' social movements to be profoundly mistaken.[32] Autonomism understands new social movements as an aspect of struggle against capitalism rather than as evidence of the death or demise of class. The unifying element between the resistances of the old and new social movements remains antagonism: 'not as the basis for the formation of a totality, but as the source of an increasingly pressing and plural expansion of the antagonism itself'.[33] For Negri, the new social movements represent a new level of class antagonism, which cannot be reduced to a mere proliferation of new subjectivities around life-needs, signalling the end of any class relation based on production of surplus value.[34] They should be understood not as a negation of working-class struggle, but as its blossoming: an enormous exfoliation, diversification and multiplication of demands, created by the revolt of previously subordinated and super-exploited sectors of labour.[35]

Importantly, autonomism argues that if capitalist production now requires an entire network of social relations, these constitute so many more points where its operations can be ruptured. No longer is the undermining of capitalism the operation of Marx's singular 'mole' – the industrial proletariat – but of what Sergio Bologna terms a 'tribe of moles'. Autonomism affirms labour's fundamental otherness from capital but valorizes the variety within labour. This leads away from vanguardist, centralized organization, directed from above, toward a lateral, polycentric concept of anti-capitalist alliances-in-diversity, connecting a plurality of agencies in a 'circulation of struggles'.[36] For Negri:

> The feminist movement, with its practices of communalism and separatism, its critique of politics and the social articulations of power, its deep distrust of any form of 'general representation' of needs and desires, its love of *differences*, must be seen as the clearest archetypal form of this new phase of the movement.[37]

Negri applauded the role of Arab students in the 1968 Paris uprising, pointing to the significance of their actions in relation to the role of immigrant workers in the wider society, how they appeared as 'an unconscious, but nonetheless effective carrier of the fundamental interest of those class fractions that are made up of the foreign workers in France: an interest in an integration that is the appropriation of wealth and power'. Where Althusser told the rioting students in 1968 to return to their classes, Negri saw in the student demonstrations in Paris in 1986, which forced the government to abandon plans to restructure universities and schools, the emergence of a new social subject: 'an intellectual subject which is nonetheless proletarian, polychrome, a collective plot of the need for equality'. These youngsters have taken the Declaration of the Rights of Man seriously; theirs is a revolutionary liberty, a liberty that embodies freedom and human solidarity. 'To the generations that knew freedom without equality, the present generation has counterposed fraternity, community and the collective reappropriation of control over communication and productive cooperation.'[38]

Negri embraces the new social movements as aspects of opposition to capital and is positively enthusiastic about such struggles because they resist the increasing mercantilization of life. The solution to the potential problem of new social movement aspirations being manipulated by capitalism is to reach a new definition of class subjectivity: 'we have to … consider *dynamically* the cultural, age, gender differences etc, in the process of class recomposition.' This can be achieved via 'a radical recovery of the Marxist method of analysis in order to grasp the new quality of class behaviours; in a perspective that can reconstitute the class subject as a whole'.[39]

Mobilizing the marginalized: labour inclusivity since the 1980s

The 'circulation of struggles' accelerated in response to heightened levels of workforce fragmentation in the globalizing period. Labour movements from the 1970s indicated increasing awareness of the need to integrate the most vulnerable sections of the workforce to prevent fragmentation augmenting corporate power under globalization. Mainstream unionism responded to this challenge of fragmentation by concerted efforts to represent – and be seen to represent – all manner of employees. Leo Panitch observed by the turn of the century that '*labour is changing in ways that make it a more inclusive social agent*'. He insisted: 'The image many people, including many of the left, have of labour is outdated … there is far more pluralism in today's working classes than is allowed for in the perspectives of those who find it convenient to essentialize labour as male, white and straight.'[40] Focus on increasing inclusivity emerged intuitively from within working-class organizations and was encouraged by new social movement influence and activism inside and outside the ranks of unionism.

Social-movement unionism, outlined in Chapter 1, is an especially militant expression of the determination to confront workforce fragmentation. Social-movement unionism is characterized not only by militancy, but also by internal

democracy, an agenda for radical social and economic change, a determination to embrace the diversity of the working class in order to overcome its fragmentation, and a capacity to appeal beyond its membership by using union power to lead fights on broad issues affecting working people. In Kim Moody's words, it 'uses the strongest of society's oppressed and exploited, generally organized workers, to mobilize those who are less able to sustain self-mobilization: the poor, the unemployed, the casualized workers, the neighborhood organisations'. Its ability to arouse broad constituencies to radical action is facilitated by its 'class vision and content'; its articulation of working-class identity provides stronger glue than that which bonds the disparate identities to which new social movements speak. As its name implies, social-movement unionism understands the need to counteract the way corporate globalization sets workers against each other, fragmenting them along lines of nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and disability – and utilizes prejudice to increase profits. Moody presents social-movement unionism as an innovative and proactive response to the tendency of corporate globalization to inflict 'racial and gender decomposition' on the working class.[41]

There are of course exceptions to the labour movement's increasing inclusivity. In Japan, for example, women workers in the 1990s felt obliged to form their own unions to avoid the problem of male-dominated organizations uninterested in women's equality, and to raise women's consciousness as workers and as women. The first women-only union, Onna Rodo Kumiai (Women's Labor Union) formed in 1990 and there are around a dozen such unions, which conduct aggressive collective action to erase wage-discrimination and gender-based pay differentials. Women's Union Tokyo, established in 1995, is the most prominent. In addition to representing individuals, its core activities are helping women to understand how they are being harassed and to be more assertive, suggesting many women workers are so browbeaten they cannot articulate their problems. Like other women-only unions, it advocates for equality for women and supports the Action Center for Working Women, an organization that aims to break down gender barriers in the workforce and encourage female union leadership.[42]

The following paragraphs provide some glimpses from around the world that indicate labour movements' heightened emphasis in the globalizing period on counteracting fragmentation. In particular, many unions found new ways to organize and support workers suffering from multiple and intersecting forms of disadvantage that subject them to compounded discrimination. For instance, the difficulties unions have faced in recent years in improving wages and conditions of Central and Eastern European posted workers in the German meat industry have forced them to engage with social movement activists, such as those concerned with migrants' rights, leading to new forms of organizing and mobilizing.[43]

Many American unions likewise showed their commitment to marginalized workers not simply through traditional organization and recruitment but also through sustained efforts at building radical political coalitions with organizations representing racial and ethnic minorities, women and homosexuals.[44] For

much of the American labour movement from the late 1980s, this strategy was not just about recruiting new members but was a way for unions to regain the moral high ground and present themselves as much more than special interest groups. Organizing drives often target workers in poorly paid and insecure jobs, many of them held by women, minorities and immigrants. Unions adopt tactics that seek to maximize media coverage and provoke a backlash among the general public against the exploitation of workers and in favour of union recognition.[45]

The exemplary union for organizing vulnerable, low-paid workers has been the SEIU; its Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign is renowned. JfJ was formed in Denver in 1985 by the SEIU to organize the predominantly non-white cleaners of commercial buildings for better wages and conditions.[46] Cleaning, like many service industries such as fast-food outlets, cannot be relocated to a lower-wage economy. It has to be provided on site. Though immune to the threat of relocation or offshoring, it is woefully underpaid. JfJ is a continuing campaign, waged city by city. A study of the Los Angeles campaign in 2000 explains how public sympathy was elicited:

> the striking janitors were symbols of the working poor. They were immigrant workers laboring nightly at low wages to clean glitzy offices occupied by wealthy executives, lawyers, and other professionals during the day. The janitors' demand for a raise of $1 an hour seemed eminently reasonable in this context and the contractors' offer of $0.50 an hour seemed heartless. Public sympathy was overwhelmingly pro-striking janitor.[47]

The JfJ strategy does not depend on a strike that halts services. Instead, it enlists public opinion, political support and sympathy from community leaders.[48] It was in Los Angeles back on 15 June 1990 that janitors were beaten by police during a peaceful demonstration against a cleaning contractor. Now, every 15 June, Justice for Janitors Day, janitors and supporters take action in cities nationwide. In addition to wage rises, JfJ also campaigns to preserve affordable health care and win coverage for janitors.[49] For example, in July 2007, just after high-profile contract victories in Houston and Miami, Cincinnati janitors won higher wages, more work hours, health insurance and paid holidays in their first-ever city-wide union contract.[50]

In general, the workers brought to unionism by the SEIU are overwhelmingly African Americans and Hispanics. Above-average rates of unionization among these minorities – a growing proportion of the population – were part of the comparative success story of the US labour movement in the 1990s.[51] The SEIU also focused on organization of women workers and encouraging females into union positions, pointing out that the labour movement could grow by organizing the low-paid and non-unionized sectors where women are concentrated, where the labour movement can expand, because women make up more than 70 per cent of restaurant servers, 90 per cent of homecare aides and 95 per cent of domestic workers.[52] Under SEIU influence, from 1995 the AFL-CIO embraced

an organizing drive that indicated determination to integrate the most vulnerable sections of the workforce into the union movement.[53] In 2004, the AFL-CIO even reversed its decades-long opposition to undocumented immigrants, finally endorsing amnesty and an end to federal sanctions against employers who hire undocumented workers.[54]

In the UK in the 1990s the Trades Union Congress campaigned against race discrimination and developed joint initiatives with ethnic minority organizations. It developed a policy on equality for gays and lesbians at work and launched an annual Pride march in conjunction with their organizations; and engaged in joint action with other movements and organizations around the agenda of family-friendly working practices and work-life balance, linking trade union concerns with those of campaigners on family and sex-equality issues. Heery and others noted a potential two-way process at work: the steady growth in the proportion of women unionists and union officers was feeding through into an increased union concern with issues such as family-friendly policies, increasing unions' attractiveness to female workers.[55]

Many British unions introduced representative mechanisms specifically for women, young workers and ethnic minorities, in order to increase their participation at all levels. For example, during the 1990s Unison (the health and local government union) embraced a new organizational principle of permitting four 'Self-Organized Groups' to operate within the union, so that members marginalized on account of race, gender, sexuality or disability could participate in union structures that formally acknowledged their other identities and gave them proportional representation on decision-making bodies; these groups became a well-established and accepted part of the union structure. Although this led to only a modest increase in the number of people from these groups assuming senior positions within trade unions, these arrangements indicate unions can implement structures and procedures to give voice to under-represented groups, rendering unions more attractive to all types of workers.[56]

In Europe there were significant actions against social exclusion, especially on the part of radical unions. For example, Solidaires, Unitaires, Démocratique (SUD) in France, particularly well represented in the transport and communication sectors, has been a prominent opponent of deportation of 'Sans-Papiers' (migrants without residency papers). SUD was one of the unions active within the Euromarches network within the European labour movement, discussed in the previous chapter for its rank-and-file regional transnationalism and in the next chapter for its activism against precarity and unemployment. Euromarches also campaigned around European policies discriminating against migrants.[57] It advocated reaching beyond 'the walls of Fortress Europe' to protect the Sans-Papiers, the 'real slaves of Europe', the southern Mediterranean/North African workers or migrants from these countries who are 'the first victims' of 'the liberal globalization process'.[58] Euromarches targets 'immigration policies, implemented by most of the EU countries, [which] force thousands of men and women to accept shameful conditions of exploitation, just to satisfy the will to profit of employers, who can then impose harder and harder working conditions

on the other workers'. It called for the accreditation of all Sans-Papiers and effective repression of all racial discrimination.[59]

In 2004, the Australian Metalworkers Union made a claim against Toyota for up to 12 days annual 'menstrual leave' for females working on car assembly lines.[60] The Australian union movement has moved determinedly away from its masculinist earlier days. The feminization of the trade union hierarchy is especially dramatic. Concerned to extend the appeal of the union movement to women, in 1989 the ACTU committed itself to having an executive that was 50 per cent female within a decade. It achieved that goal with several years to spare. The affirmative action policy achieved cultural acceptance of the appropriateness of women's participation at that level.[61] Current ACTU President Ged Kearney is female. So too was her predecessor Sharan Burrow and her predecessor Jenni George.

At ground level, an indicator of greater inclusivity in Australian unionism were the efforts of the Textile, Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) to unionize and improve the situation of outworkers – mainly immigrant women of non-English backgrounds – working from home for very low piece-work rates. In 1996 the TCFUA initiated the Fairwear campaign, along with churches and community organizations, to end 'the gross exploitation of workers who make clothing at home in our Australian community'. The number of homeworkers had increased dramatically to around 329,000 as the garment industry became globalized: trade liberalization policies reduced tariffs so market forces increased monopolies by large retailers, prompting the closure of factories and the shift to below legal wage-rates. Fairwear pointed out that the organization pushing for these policy developments was the WTO, 'an undemocratic organisation that implements free trade policies to benefit transnational corporations regardless of the effect on jobs and local communities'.[62] An 'Industry Code of Practice' was developed, and a campaign established that built on the educational and campaigning work of the TCFUA in previous years. Despite hard work and a Senate inquiry into outwork, by the year's end only four retailers had signed up to the Code: Witchery, Just Jeans, Target and Ken Done. To step up the campaign, the TCFUA lodged writs in 1998 against more than a dozen major retailers, including Nike. By early 2000, the campaign had gathered momentum and was increasingly visible in the lead-up to the Nike court case in June, where the company admitted to paying below legal wage-rates. Although Fairwear had started through the TCFUA and churches, it found growing numbers of university students inspired by the high-profile campaigns in the USA around sweatshop labour.[63]

After years of constant pressure and embarrassing adverse publicity, late in 2002 the Australian Retailers Association and TCFUA signed a Retailers Ethical Clothing Code of Practice, requiring retailers to cooperate with the union in providing the commercial records necessary for the union to police compliance with legal wage-rates and requiring retailers to take action when exploitation is uncovered.[64] In 2007 Fairwear initiated the annual Sweatshop Award, given to an Australian company who has excelled in non-compliance and avoiding

Fairwear's efforts to make the garment industry fairer for home-based outworkers. It invited people to vote at www.sweatshopaward.com to choose their favourite label to win this prestigious prize. 'Companies that have been nominated have shown exceptional innovation in ignoring the Clothing Textile and Footwear Union of Australia, the Fairwear campaign and other groups who have asked them repeatedly to become accredited to the Homeworkers Code of Practice.' People are invited annually to the glamorous ceremony where one lucky label is honoured with the impressive sweatshop trophy.[65]

Marginalized workers themselves often prompt greater inclusivity on the part of unions. For instance, in the UK the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS), which had existed in the 1980s, was relaunched in 2003, announcing: 'We are workers, we are Latin American, and we are immigrants. These are the pillars of our identity and why we fight.'[66] Ethnic identity was an important aid in collective class mobilization, according to David Però in his study of how the LAWAS in London embedded its activists 'in a solidarity circuit where class and ethnicity are interwoven, making them feel stronger and cared about'.[67] LAWAS focused on education about workplace rights, union organization and immigration issues. It became a major recruiter for the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), which covered occupations where many Latin American immigrants worked as cleaners or security guards. In 2004 the TGWU offered LAWAS an office and basic facilities in its building. Over the next few years, LAWAS was an important component in the TGWU's Justice for Cleaners campaign, which achieved some significant victories, as had the JfJ movement in the USA.[68]

However, in 2009 the union Unite, formed by merger of the TGWU with Amicus, expelled LAWAS from its office due to serious disagreement with LAWAS's opposition to any border controls and its organization of undocumented migrant workers, which encouraged immigration raids. There were limits to Unite's support for LAWAS. Into the organizational gap in the Justice for Cleaners campaign created by this unfortunate rift stepped the IWW. In 2011 it welcomed LAWAS members into the IWW Cleaners Branch. Over the following year, as Jack Kirkpatrick relates, this scrappy little union organized hundreds of workers into campaigns, saved jobs and won wage rises while protecting terms and conditions. 'In an age of austerity, across the secretive and frankly very strange world of the City of London, David was quite successfully kicking the crap out of Goliath.'[69]

In Mexico late last century movements of women workers mobilized for improvements in working conditions and to combat injustices in maquiladoras. According to Joe Bandy and Jennifer Bickham Mendez, they forced a reconceptualization of the traditional terrain of class struggle and its subjects. Female activists stressed how land rights, public services, environmental health, domestic violence and other crimes against women were related to the denial of labour rights and economic deprivation under an exploitative and patriarchal form of export processing. Because of their influence, many unions became more inclusive of the methods and critiques of women organizers, expanding the

diverse scope of national and cross-border coalitions. The experience of Mexico confirmed the observations of many researchers that, as women's presence has grown in labour markets, they have challenged unions to attend to issues such as maternity leave, second shifts, homework, discrimination, wage inequalities, low-wage work, reproductive health and sexual harassment.[70] Female workers and gender issues have been prominent in the 2015 farmworkers' strikes in the San Quintín Valley, discussed in Chapter 4.

In Nicaragua the Women's Secretariat of the Sandinista Workers' Central, the largest union confederation, responded to the adverse effects on women workers of neoliberal policies by founding subsidized day-care centres, free clinics for women and credit funds for women's enterprises, at the same time as it worked to organize and support workers in maquiladoras. With transnational input from women's organizations encouraged by women workers' movements in Mexico and Nicaragua, Bandy and Mendez conclude from these case studies that, as dialogue regarding gender and economics expands, place-based identities of resistance become trans-local and coalitional, with greater potential to engage in radically democratic opposition to neoliberal globalization.[71]

The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, discussed in the previous chapter, specifically encourages critical thinking about gender relations in maquiladoras. CJM organizer Marta Ojeda, a former maquiladora worker who helped found CJM, maintains that violence against women is caused by both patriarchy and capitalism, exacerbated by neoliberalism. In 2004–2005 maquiladora workers and their families occupied land in Nueva Laredo where they could live without paying rent and grow some food. CJM women took a lead in establishing these communities and mobilizing against eviction; they continue to play leadership roles, pursuing sustainable practices such as taking over a nearby water source and installing taps on streets, building a small clinic, solar ovens and a wind generator, and establishing community gardens that grow fruit, vegetables and herbs. CJM also organizes meetings that bring together factory workers in the north with indigenous community members from the south, bridging historic racial divisions, enabling communities to learn from each other's long history of organizing.[72]

In Japan, foreign workers are relatively few. They are primarily South Americans, often of Japanese descent, or non-Japanese Asians, performing unskilled low-wage work, especially in factories. The most important union advocates for immigrant workers in Japan are not the mainstream unions but the more radical, smaller individual-affiliate unions. Union Mie has been deeply involved with immigrant workers since 2003 when it helped six Brazilian-Japanese workers receive severance allowances after layoffs at their factory. With subsequent struggles in support of foreign workers, including furious strikes and demonstrations, its commitment encouraged South American immigrant workers to join it in large numbers. Kanagawa City Union, whose membership is primarily South American, has also become a prominent advocate of strengthening foreign workers' rights. In addition to labour issues such as dismissals and non-payment of wages, it deals with broader issues such as housing, visa problems and racially

motivated violence. Its signature activity is the 'Day Long Action', conducted 50–60 times a year in support of its negotiations. These regular demonstrations are designed to draw attention to the large volume of disputes it handles and to turn recipients of union services into active participants. For that reason, too, it requires union members to provide unpaid help in the office.[73]

At the international level the 1990s was distinguished by a new emphasis on international trade union solidarity against widening social divisions. Myconos describes the World Congresses of the ICFTU in this decade as watershed events because of the stress on social issues. Global Unions from their earliest days also engaged in building relationships with NGOs campaigning against child labour, slavery and for women's rights, safety and the environment. There was a discernible shift in priorities across the ensemble of labour organizations away from the instrumental, parochial and functional, to a set of interests reflecting concern for human rights, equity and social justice. At the ICFTU's Seventeenth World Congress in Durban in 2000 affiliates committed to a global social justice agenda in a raft of statements and resolutions; and this Congress announced the ICFTU was looking to extend its relationships with NGOs. The deepening alliances with progressive civil-realm actors were grounded in the growing sense of urgency about the need to mobilize together against neoliberalism.[74]

Robert O'Brien argues that by 2000 increasing cooperation between labour and other movements had transformed the international union movement to embrace new social movement aspirations, with important knock-on effects. It would change the nature of global competition by making it difficult to compete on the basis of super-exploitation, because practices such as using child and unorganized labour would increasingly be contested, as would unequal treatment of female workers and disregard for environmental impacts. This would form part of a larger campaign aimed at challenging the dominance of free-market forces as the central mechanism for organizing social life. If O'Brien was too confident, he was nonetheless right to observe that the *possibility* of such a development depends on the participation of the international labour movement. 'Labour organizations, particularly trade unions, occupy strategic sectors in the global economy, possess an institutional structure that brings benefits (as well as the often cited costs) and wield traditional forms of influence and power.'[75]

O'Brien brings to the international level the insights enunciated during the 1980s by Ralph Miliband in his analysis of the connections between labour movements and the burgeoning new social movements. Miliband outlined the ways in which the priorities of new social movements could not be abstracted from class and how the oppressions these movements rebel against are shaped by class. A bourgeois woman experiences male domination, but in ways very different from a working-class woman; similarly, the power of a bourgeois man to oppress a woman in particular and women generally is much greater than that of his proletarian counterpart.[76] While he stressed that the notion of the 'primacy' of labour movements as agencies of radical change did not require devaluation of new social movements' importance, Miliband insisted that new social movements could achieve little without the power that alone could contest ruling-class

power. This was the power of the producing class, its ability to effect political change based on its strategic location in the economy, the necessity of its labour and the havoc that could be wreaked through its withdrawal. So long as organized labour and its political agencies refused to fulfil their transformative potential, the existing social order would remain safe. Whatever feminists, black people, gays and lesbians, environmentalists, peace activists or any other group might choose to do, and even though their actions might well produce advances and reforms, the basic structures of power would endure. Without labour movements, 'no fundamental challenge to the existing social order can ever be mounted'.[77]

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76 Ralph Miliband, *Divided Societies: Class Struggle in Contemporary Capitalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 96.
77 Miliband, *Divided Societies*, p. 110.

7 Opposing unemployment and precarity

> The whole form of the movement of modern industry depends … upon the constant transformation of a part of the labouring population into unemployed or half-employed hands.
>
> (Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949, p. 647)

The problem of intersecting forms of labour market disadvantage has become more serious. The major forms of workplace fragmentation are reinforcing, because women, the young and people from subordinated racial/ethnic groups are disproportionately unemployed or employed less securely than males from dominant groups. So the compounding effect of multiple discriminations has been heightened by increasing unemployment and precarious employment. In 2014, women and young people under 30 were over-represented among the 1.5 billion workers worldwide in precarious employment, according to Global Unions.[1] Despite higher than ever educational attainments, in 2014 the unemployment rate for those aged 15–24 (13.1 per cent in 2013) was almost three times greater than for adults; and young women were disproportionately affected. Social discontent, fueled by heightened youth unemployment, is common to all parts of the world.[2]

However, even older, white males within the workforce are more likely nowadays to suffer employment insecurity, because high unemployment and increasing precarity of employment is the dominant tendency in labour markets everywhere. In the globalization epoch, the world's workers are not only more exploited but also less likely to have the opportunity to be exploited. Over 201 million people around the world were unemployed in 2014, an increase of over 31 million since 2008; the ILO anticipates unemployment will worsen over the next five years.[3] At the same time, those in full-time employment are working longer hours than in 1969.[4] High unemployment rates force employed workers to accept intolerable amounts of overtime, for fear of losing their jobs.

The reserve army of labour

Capitalism has an inbuilt tendency to create unemployment and underemployment. Employers reduce labour costs not simply by attacking wage levels

but also by employing as few people as possible and replacing humans with machines and computerized systems. Computer technology is not problematic in itself. If an employer entered his/her work premises and said: 'There's this wonderful new high-tech machinery I'm about to introduce and this means you'll all be able to work fewer hours and get better pay', employees would embrace this change with considerable enthusiasm, for it would constitute 'progress' for all concerned – if utilized in such a way. Unfortunately, computer technology is introduced and developed within the context of a capitalist mode of production and social relations and at a time when capitalists have greater freedom to displace workers and refuse remaining workers fair share of the benefits of computer-enhanced increased productivity.

Employers invariably argue wages need lowering to encourage employment, but no wage levels seem low enough to abate capitalism's propensity to generate unemployment, as the use of robots in low-wage economies suggests.[5] The perpetual relocation of production to developing countries spectacularly exacerbates capitalism's tendency to create unemployment in developed countries. As a result of this shift, the OECD's share in world manufacturing has dramatically decreased; so unemployment in these countries has risen markedly. Between 1999 and 2003, the USA lost one in nine manufacturing jobs.[6] By 2009, fewer than 12 million Americans were working in manufacturing; and manufacturing's share of GDP had dropped to 11.5 per cent from about 28 per cent in 1959. Between 2000 and 2014 the USA lost 5.5 million manufacturing jobs, a decline of 32 per cent in a decade and a half.[7]

The wholesale relocation of manufacturing plants transformed and impoverished former blue-collar working-class environments in OECD countries. Britain's cities and towns lie littered with the remnants of a manufacturing past, as Charlie Winstanley has commented: 'Once the workshop of the world, the British economy is now a clearing house for the world's cheques, and a market for its consumer goods.'[8] The IMF conceded in 2002 that competition from low-wage economies displaces workers from high-wage jobs and decreases the demand for less skilled workers in 'advanced economies'. While others benefit from globalization, 'some groups may lose out. For instance, workers in declining older industries may not be able to make an easy transition to new industries'. Nonetheless, it warned against governments pursuing policies to maintain such industries. 'The economy as a whole will prosper more from policies that embrace globalization by promoting an open economy.'[9]

This 'open' economy ensures it is not just blue-collar workers who experience the adverse effects of the reserve army of labour. Wholesale relocation and offshoring of partial operations have threatened the remuneration and working conditions of a wide range of white-collar employees. Not just call-centre jobs, but all sorts of 'uptown jobs' have also been shipped out. For example, highly trained engineers and draftsmen, architects, computer programmers and other high-tech workers are increasingly employed by US companies in China, Russia, India and the Philippines.[10] Body-shopping is another job-threatening phenomenon in IT work, enabling companies to access individuals or a team to work

remotely or on the business's premises, in conjunction with its existing team, for example, the flying in of Indian IT workers to European or US offices for short periods. Chair of the Unite Workers Branch of IT professionals in a large office in Northamptonshire, interviewed in June 2004, quoted workers at a union meeting stating that body-shopping 'made us realize we are just a commodity'.[11]

Andrew Viller found IT workers in Sydney in 2003 were suffering significant work-related stress, enduring coercion and chronic unpaid overtime due to fears of the reserve army of IT workers available to replace them, and anxiety that their work might be outsourced.[12] Santiago described his typical physical symptoms: 'I'd start having nose bleeds, I'd have like veins popping from my forehead and stuff like that. Bad sleeping habits, like I became insomniac. No lunch breaks, no daylight … which really affects your mental ability.'[13] In 2009 French Telecom workers spontaneously walked out in solidarity with a colleague who committed suicide because of similar stress. There were a series of walkouts across France on 29 September as other employees protested against the work pressures that led to his death.[14]

In Japan, where cultural norms about company loyalty have encouraged long working hours, the situation has become so much worse that the medico-legal phenomenon of 'karōshi' (death from overwork) has been officially recognized for more than two decades and has spawned a social movement to combat it. The problem increased significantly from the 1990s when cost pressures and labour market deregulation prompted employers to hire ever-greater numbers of non-regular workers (including part-timers, fixed-term contract workers and agency temporary workers). Between 1997 and 2004, non-regular jobs increased by 3.97 million and 4.32 regular jobs were lost. Because non-regular workers frequently go absent or quit suddenly, regular workers are forced to cover their work; employers have manipulated Japanese social norms and aspirations to impose unreasonable overtime rates on regular employees, often without additional payment.[15]

Since the GFC, the situation for workers in OECD countries has worsened further. Between 2008 and 2014, the number of long-term unemployed (out of work for at least a year) increased by 85 per cent. In the first quarter of 2014, almost 45 million people were unemployed in the OECD's 34 member countries, 11.9 million more than just before 2008. The OECD cited growing evidence that much of the unemployment had become structural and would thus be more difficult to reverse. It expressed concern that unemployment, along with declining real wages, had serious adverse effects for both social cohesion and productivity. European Central Bank president Mario Draghi also acknowledged both phenomena have undermined efforts to increase consumer spending to encourage economic recovery.[16]

Capitalism's labour-shedding propensity creates a problem for itself. As 'Krisis-Group' scholars have noted, 'Competition drives companies to eject human beings from the labour process even while it relies on those people as consumers and producers of value.' Yet 'Krisis-Group' suggests that work is too often seen as central to resolving the current crisis rather than the problem in

itself, as 'a form of life that technological development is making redundant'.[17] On the contrary, the huge growth of the world labour force suggests that work remains central. So the task for labour movements must be to improve the circumstances under which work is performed. However, this is made hugely difficult, because capitalism's inbuilt tendency to create unemployment and underemployment generates a 'reserve army of labour' that serves immensely valuable purposes for capital, as Marx emphasized. 'The industrial reserve army, during the periods of stagnation and average prosperity, weighs down the active labour-army; during the periods of over-production and paroxysm, it holds its pretensions in check.'[18] Globalization has created a worldwide industrial reserve army, with hugely deleterious consequences for labour everywhere.

In the globalizing era, an increasingly significant component of the reserve army of labour is the precariat, as it has become known, used by employers as buffers against fluctuations in demand. Corporations are thus transferring risk away from themselves and imposing it instead on human beings; they hope to construct not simply a flexible labour force but one that also accepts precarious work conditions and consents in effect to continuous transitions between low-wage jobs punctuated by periods of unemployment.[19] The precariat has moved from the peripheral position it had under Fordism to a core position in the process of capital accumulation nowadays, as the proportion of workers who are temporary, contingent, casual, intermittent, keeps increasing.[20] Employment patterns are reverting to those of earlier periods when precarious forms of labour were common. Unions were important forces that succeeded in making precarious employment uncommon in many countries for much of the twentieth century.

Guy Standing, however, identifies the precariat as a new class that has emerged from neoliberal restructuring. It is 'a class-in-the-making' consisting of a multitude of insecure people, living bits-and-pieces lives, in and out of short-term jobs, without a narrative of occupation development, including millions of frustrated educated youth, millions of women abused in oppressive labour, growing numbers of criminalized tagged for life, millions being categorized as 'disabled' and migrants in their millions around the world; they are denizens with more restricted social, cultural, political and economic rights than citizens around them.[21] Various scholars have pondered precarious consciousness.[22]

For Standing, too, the nature of the precariat's consciousness, as well as its role in production, is why it makes sense to depict it in class terms. The precariat, as a group desired by global capitalism, is an integral part of the production system, with distinctive relations of production and consciousness of specific insecurities. It is cut off not only from the classic circuits of capital accumulation, but also from the logic of collective bargaining between employers and workers as stable providers of stable labour. The precariat cannot relate to old notions of fixed workplaces, the pillar of industrial democracy as conceived in the twentieth century, nor old-style social-democratic or labour parties.

> Unless the cries from the precariat are heard and incorporated into a new politics of paradise, the stirrings that have been heard and seen in the streets

and squares of Greece, Spain, England and elsewhere will only be the harbinger of much more anger and upheaval.[23]

Struggles against segmentation

Workforces are dangerously segmented on the basis of hours worked and degree of security of employment – *dangerously segmented* because employers benefit not simply from the 'flexibility' of their workforces but also from the adverse effects on both permanent and precarious workers of this division that impedes collective resistance. The old union adage of 'United We Bargain, Divided We Beg' is especially relevant in pointing to the perils workforce segmentation can pose to labour movement activism. While some unions (often to their organizational detriment) short-sightedly protect only the interests of permanent, full-time employees, many unions are aware of the importance of solidarity between workers across different forms of employment. Some examples from around the world are offered, both negative and positive, which bear out the material wisdom of solidarity, concluding with a case study of two different union approaches in an EPZ in Poland.

In the case of unemployed workers, if employed workers fear and victimize them, employers benefit even more than they would normally from the powerful negative effects of a reserve army of labour on the actually employed army of labour. The 'piqueteros' (picketers) of Argentina are an inspiring example of experienced unionists helping to mobilize unemployed workers during the recession of the late 1990s and early this century, when unemployment levels had reached 22 per cent from historically low figures of 3 to 6 per cent. Through establishing roadblocks and pursuing other militant strategies, the piqueteros succeeded in extracting significant policy changes from the government, including more social assistance, job-creation schemes and a more protectionist trade policy. Though various unions and left-wing forces were involved, they always united to fight attacks against the piqueteros.[24]

The usage of 'precarity' and 'precariat' grew out of struggles. They date back to around 2000, to the 'Marches Européennes contre le chômage la précarité et les exclusions' (European Marches against unemployment, precarity and social exclusion) and the 'Stop Précarité' French far-left union network that grew out of strikes of young part-timers at McDonald's and Pizza Hut.[25] The Euromarches network, discussed in the previous chapter for its campaigning on behalf of immigrant workers, challenged the increasing segmentation within workforces on the basis of hours worked or not worked, by developing links between workers, the casually employed and the unemployed. Breakaway radical unions and tendencies within unions demanded a shorter working week without loss of pay, coupled to public-sector job-creation measures, demands which resonated with new independent organizations of the unemployed that were engaged in struggles against unemployment and welfare cutbacks.[26]

Euromarches was born from a coalition of unemployed people, assisted by radical trade unions. Over two months from 14 April 1997 unemployed people

marched across Europe to the EU summit that was meeting in Amsterdam to sign the Maastricht II agreement. The march culminated on 14 June in a demonstration of around 50,000 people against unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion. The initiative came from the French unemployed network Action Chômage, launched in 1993 by militant unionists and their associates, and all those seeking an end to unemployment and fighting for 'a redistribution of working hours and the riches of society'. It described itself as a movement gathering together the unemployed, the precariously employed and the employed, who were fighting against: unemployment and precarious employment; neoliberal politicians and policies; rights and collective bargaining of salaries being replaced by individual contracts; attacks on the right to work; surveillance, social control and intrusions into private life. 'Victimes de la précarisation du travail et de la vie, nous refusons la culpabilisation.' ('Victims of precarization of work and of life, we refuse to accept this.')[27] Also very committed to Euromarches were two German organizations representing unemployed workers: the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Erwerbsloseninitiativen (national working group of initiatives representing the unemployed) and the Arbeitslosenverband (unemployed coalition).[28]

After the Amsterdam coming-out party of Euromarches, radical French trade unions such as SUD, Syndicat national unifié des impôts and the Tous Ensemble wing of the Confédération française démocratique du travail (French Democratic Confederation of Labour) supported its week-long actions in France late in 1997. These were mainly occupations of job-centres, to draw attention to homelessness and unemployment, and to protest for reinstatement of the traditional Christmas bonus to recipients of unemployment benefits.[29] From 1997, for more than a decade, Euromarches, headquartered in Paris, expressed and mobilized Europe-wide radical labour movement resistance to the neoliberalization of the EU constitution and European governments' policies.[30]

Euromarches consisted of 'a network of organizations and trade unions, fighting in different EU countries', which elaborated common claims at the EU level and organized coordinated Europe-wide actions. According to the 'Who we are' section of its website, it represented 'unemployed – increasingly badly provided for-, insecure workers – more and more disposable-, young people – deprived of the right to an income-, workers – forced into badly paid part-time work, put under more and more pressure, whose rights are more and more attacked'. Euromarches blamed the hardships of these groups on 'the liberal globalization process', which 'doesn't take into account the rights nor the needs of millions of people in Europe'. Euromarches' main demands were: the right to an income (equal to 50 per cent of GDP per head); opposition to casualization; shorter working hours and more permanent and socially useful jobs; renewal of public services; and better protection of the rights of unemployed and insecure workers, and migrants.[31] It issued the European Marches' Charter of Demands For European Basic Social Rights. It aimed for a society 'where solidarity and not competition has priority', where there was 'a real sharing of the riches produced, so that everywoman and everyman can get a salary or at least an income that will

simply permit them to lead a decent life'. It worked toward 'the emergence of a European social movement capable of unifying East and West, the struggles of the workers, the unemployed, and the precarious workers for another Europe and for another world'.[32]

Other countries apart from France in which there was significant trade union support for Euromarches included Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Austria and Sweden.[33] In Germany, the radical United Services Union, Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (Ver.Di) was supportive of the Euromarches agenda and enthusiastic about solidarity actions with radical social movements.[34] It ran its own 'Gerecht geht anders' (Justice Done Differently) project that was an umbrella for five campaigns around: precarious work; cities in crisis; two classes of health care; cuts to social spending; and extension of the working age to 67. The project involves interactive community engagement, enabling the union to position itself as an advocate for community concerns at local, state and federal levels.[35] Ver.Di explicitly linked the precarization and casualization of the labour market to liberalization of labour market law from 2004. It noted that the number of casually employed workers had risen from 300,000 in 2004 to a million in 2010. It campaigned for a minimum wage and for 'equal pay for equal work'. For example, at a demonstration it organized in Hamburg outside H&M headquarters, it pointed out that its full-time employees were paid around €12 per hour and casuals performing the same work were paid €7.41 per hour, constituting 'a modern form of slavery'.[36]

However, the German labour movement in general did not throw its weight behind the Euromarches' agenda. In 1999 the Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft unabhängiger Erwebsloseninitiativen (federal association of independent unemployed people's initiatives) complained that it was no longer able to mobilize support for the unemployed, welfare recipients and asylum seekers as effectively as it had the previous year. This was due to 'widespread hope for change in social policy under the new Schröder government' and because 'unions expressed little support for a campaign against a social democratic government'.[37]

In France, by contrast, resistance with the help of strike action persisted. Early in 2006 French workers and students resorted to grand refusal to overturn government attempts to undermine working conditions, especially employment security, for younger employees. With huge student demonstrations and university occupations, and nationwide strikes called by French unions that caused chaos for weeks, the government was forced to withdraw the law that would have made it much easier for employers to fire workers under 26. Also in 2006 a lengthy general strike in Denmark, accompanied by university occupations, forced the conservative Danish government to back down on its attempts to reduce welfare benefits for students and other young people.[38]

In Japan in 2009 small individual-affiliate unions joined with left-wing activists to operate Haken Mura, a tent village for homeless unemployed workers during the New Year's holiday in Tokyo's Hibiya Park adjacent to the major national ministries, particularly the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. Haken Mura (Dispatch Village) alludes to 'haken rodosha' (dispatch or agency

temporary workers), who are often summarily dismissed mid-contract. Although the organizers initially excluded the major unions from the planning stages because of their conservatism, these unions did serve as official sponsors once the event was underway from 31 December 2008 through to 4 January 2009. Around 500 stayed in the village; the publicity embarrassed the government and pressured the opposition Democratic Party to advocate labour law improvements.[39]

The case of Japanese unionism is a stark example of the urgent need for unions to confront workforce segmentation and support all workers regardless of employment status. Mainstream Japanese unions confederated in Rengo have expressed rather than challenged feelings of superiority on the part of regular workers towards those less securely employed, and endorsed Japanese norms about company loyalty, to the detriment of all manner of workers, including regulars. In the pressing case of karōshi, most labour unions in Japan have accepted the logic of commitment in exchange for security and are unwilling to press strongly for work-hour reduction, partly because of the reliance of many union members on overtime allowances; and the close ties of many unions to management inhibit them from demanding improved work conditions.[40]

The void created by mainstream union conservatism is being filled by new individual-affiliate unions, whose emergence is facilitated by labour laws that permit union formation by any two employees. These have arisen in response to the deterioration of employment conditions since 1990 and the rising number of ill-treated workers, which created demand for more assertive unionism, especially on behalf of insecurely employed workers. Charles Weathers argues that the steady growth of an underclass of young workers since the 1990s has encouraged the emergence of more intense labour activism. These small but energetic individual-affiliate unions (often known in Japan as 'community unions') pride themselves on protecting individual workers and seeking social justice. They strongly oppose corporate power, regard the state and its agencies as too passive and revile Rengo unions for lack of concern about working conditions, especially the situation of marginal workers.[41]

Confederated since 2003 in the Japan Community Union Federation, these alternative unions have established a reputation as models of progressive unionism and innovators of labour strategies, an attractive contrast to mainstream unions, which rarely engage in dynamic activities such as demonstrations or strikes. Novel tactics have raised their profile as champions of marginalized workers. Newspapers and other news outlets cite their officials as experts on labour problems, such as irregular low-income workers. They conduct surveys and operate telephone hotlines, partly to 'generate buzz for the media', as Weathers explains. The Tokyo Young Contingent Workers Union has been very effective at generating publicity by staging impromptu outdoor meetings just prior to conducting grievance negotiations, near or in front of the target company. The assembled workers then seek to participate en masse in the bargaining sessions; up to 15 union members at a time have managed to do so. This union also holds dinners and other events appealing especially to young people to build a solidaristic union culture.[42]

Individual-affiliate unions each work closely with labour rights groups, such as the Center to Protect the Lives and Health of Working Persons and the Association of Families Concerned with Karōshi.[43] There are also wider networks of individual-affiliate unions and civil-society groups and supporters, including academics and lawyers. For example, Gaten-kei Rentai was established in October 2006 by Ikeda Ikkei and Wada Yoshimitsu, while working at Hino, a Toyota-operated truck manufacturer, where they had previously founded a union, Nikken Sogyo Union, and won a pay increase. 'Gaten-kei' is slang for workers doing unskilled manufacturing and other low-status manual work; 'rentai' means solidarity. Like Posse, a similar organization, Gaten-kei Rentai targets young people in low-paid, insecure jobs. Ikkei and Yoshimitsu explain on its website that the scorn of regular workers was the strongest motivation for founding it.[44] Interestingly, Rengo unions have become more proactive on the issue. On 14 May 2015 nearly 2,500 unionists from across Rengo, Zenroren and Zenrokyo confederations rallied in Tokyo to oppose a new law that will increase casualization and overtime. A wide range of labour movement activists warned the deregulation measures would increase the already high incidence of karōshi.[45]

When permanent workers feel themselves privileged and disdain to support precarious workers' struggles to improve their situation, employer use of precarious labour is encouraged, undermining the wages and conditions of permanent workers and threatening the superior nature of their employment contracts. Problems of division and urgent need to transcend them were prominent in the Delhi industrial belt struggles discussed in Chapter 4. The following 'bad union' story, regrettably not rare, shows how workers lose when unions replicate workforce segmentation in their organizational structures and strategies.

Interviewed in May 2011, several unionists from an alliance of outsourced logistics workers' unions at Indonesia's largest container port, Jakarta International Container Terminal (JICT), told of their experiences in 2010 when the company unlawfully dismissed most of the outsourced workers after they joined a protest. The situation of outsourced workers had deteriorated after JICT was privatized in 1999. Though comprising 60 per cent of the workforce, outsourced workers could not join the JICT union, which exclusively organizes the 40 per cent of workers with permanent status. The outsourced workers established a coalition to fight for their rights, called Alliansi Pekerja Outsourcing – JICT. It began raising grievances in 2009, to no avail. It consolidated its efforts and, together with a national coalition of unions, the Komite Solidaritas Nasional (Committee for National Solidarity), actively took up a nation-wide campaign against union-busting, privatization and labour market 'flexibility'. On 1 February 2010, more than 500 outsourced workers participated in a two-hour strike, which caused enormous loss for the company, proving that outsourced workers played a vital and strategic role. Management came to appease them and promised to enter into negotiations, but the permanent workers' union impeded the settlement, resulting in company intimidation of the outsourced workers' unionists and dismissal of most of them, despite Labour Office recommendation they be made permanent.[46]

In stark contrast in Italy in recent years, an independent trade union, Si-Cobas, has successfully organized precariously employed workers' struggles outside the confines of social-democratic unions that have tended to compromise with employers. Since the GFC the most important industrial disputes in Italy are the increasing number of strikes in the logistics and freight transport sectors. Despite severe repression by the state and employers, these strikes have been successful due to the organizational efforts of Si-Cobas and the activism of precariously employed immigrant workers. They have at different times successfully blocked the most important logistics hubs of northern Italy (such as Bologna and Padua) and some of the largest transnational corporations in logistics, large-scale distribution and the food industry.[47] In 2015 a documentary *Ditching the Fear – the Logistics Workers' Movement in Italy* told the tale of the 'lively and strong resistance … forming at the bottom end of the wage scale'. It shows how the precariously employed, mostly migrant, workers in the logistics sector have been successful in changing their working conditions and their whole lives through solidarity and effective organizing.[48]

Across South America, unions are stepping up the fight against precarious work.[49] For example, in Peru in December 2014 unions joined with youth and other groups to oppose a controversial new youth labour law, dubbed 'La Ley Pulpín', which would cut back benefits and entitlements for young workers, especially those precariously employed. Protests have taken over Lima's principal thoroughfares and one of the marches led to the headquarters of Chile's largest private business and industry chamber. The demonstrations displayed energy, creativity and irreverence, very different in style to traditional labour mobilizations, and appeared to be spontaneous. Nonetheless, the origins of the movement lie in hard organizational efforts of labour, student and other movements. Media attempts to stigmatize the movement have not succeeded, with public support for it suggesting considerable scepticism about the neoliberalism and extractivism of Peruvian politics. Protest is opening up history, according to Lima historian and activist Rafael Hoetmer:

> another possible Peru can be seen in the streets, something new is being born: new ways of organizing, new political language, networks, and strategies that belong to the current moment … the strength and energy of these protests leads one to believe that something is moving within the 'Lima Consensus'.[50]

In Turkey, largely spontaneous waves of labour resistance, such as the recent struggles of Kazova, Greif, Feniş, Zentiva, Şişecam, Yatağan workers, have opposed precarious work with radical strategies like workplace occupation, general strikes, destruction of means of production and direct confrontation with state power.[51] With Austrian unemployment at a record high, the Aktive Arbeitslose Österreich (Active Unemployed Austria) is campaigning vigorously against stigmatization of unemployed people as 'work-shy'.[52] In Scotland, the Unemployed Workers' Network is very active in assisting claimants in negotiations

with the Department for Work and Pensions; and welfare activists suffer harassment from authorities for their efforts, including an arrest early in 2015.[53] Around the world, the unemployed and precariously employed are mobilizing, with or without the support of more fortunately employed workers and their unions.

Global Unions acknowledge that it is not in the interests of mainstream unions as organizations to ignore, let alone undermine, precarious workers' struggles. According to the ITUC, the fact that around 1.5 billion workers worldwide are in precarious employment is 'a compelling reason' to reach out and organize them.[54] However, rhetoric at the international labour movement level is not always matched by determined ground-level organizing, whether from lack of resources or of will. So, precarious workers are often fighting against their circumstances by establishing new unions, sometimes of an anarcho-syndicalist bent like the IWW, by-passing established unions and contributing further to the decline of older unions, as the following case study shows.

'We must act together': at Chung Hong Electronics in Poland

Poland has the most precariously employed labour force in the EU. The number of limited labour contracts increased from 5.8 per cent in 2000 to 27.7 per cent by 2011, when the EU average was 14 per cent. A further 20.9 per cent of Polish employees, mostly young people, are even more precariously employed through temporary labour agencies on what are known as 'umowy śmieciowe' ('junk-contracts'). These have become a political issue, because the Polish government has increasingly used such contracts since the GFC to further reduce labour rights. In addition to increasing rates of precarious employment, since 2008 unemployment has risen and real wages have fallen. Poland is also the only EU member state that has SEZs. Established from 1995 to attract international investment, the government advertised Poland's low wages, relatively well-trained workforce, tax rebates, cheap land, customs reductions and direct subsidies. The EU prohibits such zones but, prior to its entry to the EU in 2004, Poland negotiated that its 14 SEZs could continue until at least 2020. With more and more industrial areas added to the existing zones, about 10 per cent of Polish manufacturing employees work in SEZs, for companies such as Volkswagen, Fiat, GM, Toyota, Electrolux, Gilette, Michelin, Bridgestone and Kraft. In the SEZs and in Polish factories in general, common forms of precarious labour are limited labour contracts or hire through temporary labour agencies.[55]

At the Chung Hong Electronics factory in the Wroclaw-Kobierzyce SEZ in south-west Poland, the proportion of workers with limited contracts or hired through temporary agencies is about 80–85 per cent of the company's workforce.[56] This Chinese subcontractor produces components for Korean company LG, which produces electronics, chemicals and telecommunications products in over 80 countries. The plant was opened in 2007 with about 200 employees earning about 1,600 zloty if permanent and 1,400 if temporary. In peak production periods in autumn and spring the workforce is doubled to

around 400 employees, through the hire of workers via temporary agencies for periods as short as several days. To increase their meagre wages, workers endure compulsory overtime by working on Saturdays; the six-day working week is made worse by huge travelling distances for most workers, adding up to 12 hours a day at work and commuting. Compulsory overtime can also entail double shifts totalling 16 hours. During each eight-hour shift there is only one break, of 20 minutes. The majority of workers are female and there is a clear gendered division of labour with men doing the better-paid work and women staying on the lowest wage levels even after years of service.[57] Most of the regular workers have limited labour contracts for six or 12 months, which get renewed until the company would be obliged to make them permanent, when they are usually fired then re-employed with another limited contract, if the company wants them. 'Here you never feel safe', said one worker. 'One day you have work, but the next day you don't. You never know who will be affected.'[58]

The work is unrewarding. Jola was employed as a senior operator: 'If I make a mistake, I will be fired. In addition, we feel constant pressure to meet the extremely high standards.' However, Kasia reported that 'we stopped the production line because the products had defects. But a manager turned it back on, without worrying about the defects – it is essential to produce as much as possible.' She commented that they were treated like machines. 'Some time ago I was on sick-leave', she recalled.

> The first day I got a message from the director that I should not be sick as that brings losses to the company. He told me to justify myself and immediately return to the factory. [He] constantly repeats that nothing is more important than coming to work.

Jola also mentioned that even when the temperature in the factory was exceeding 33°C and workers were losing consciousness, air conditioners would not be used to save electricity costs. 'Therefore, workers often shared their ideas on the need to set up a union. We had to take steps to increase our strength in relation to the employer.'[59]

A small group of workers had been thinking for some time about how to act against the working conditions, but had not received much interest from unions they had contacted.[60] According to Gosia, there were not many unions in SEZ factories: 'Large trade unions are not interested in these work-sites because many of the workers here have temporary contracts.'[61] During 2011 a member of Inicjatywna Pracownicza (IP), 'Workers' Initiative', started working at the factory to conduct research for her doctoral thesis on working conditions in SEZs.[62] Until her contract finished just before Christmas, she talked with other workers, who thought it was the worst workplace in the whole zone, especially after the employer used the financial crisis to justify wage cuts and worsen conditions. A workers' meeting on 6 December decided to form an IP group at the factory.[63]

IP was formed in Poland in 2001 as an informal group of worker activists. It was then established in September 2004 as a formal but independent, grassroots

trade union in the anarcho-syndicalist tradition. Its creation was a reaction against the bureaucracy and passivity of Polish trade unionism, and its links with reactionary governments. IP recruits precarious workers such as those from temporary labour agencies, students and unemployed; and focuses on the situation of migrant workers and the rights of precarious workers. By 2013 IP had more than 30 sections in Lodz, Szczecin, Gorzow, Poznan, Kostrzyn, Zielona Gora, Silesia-Krakow, Opole, Warsaw, Gdansk and Torun; and smaller groups in other cities. It publishes the *Workers' Initiative* bulletin and the *Silesian Syndicalist* newspaper. Its general rules state:

> We are struggling for regaining the control over our life, both in the places we work and live. We are struggling for a completely different world, because we are convinced that capitalism, like state socialism, cannot be reformed. Deep social, economic and political changes are needed.

The IP movement, it explained, was a response to extremely corrupted trade unions, which had too often betrayed the cause for which initially they were fighting.

> Those organized in IP undertake efforts to create the workers' movement based on the grass-roots and voluntary autonomy – the movement that would be able to go beyond the divisions between workers and be able to successfully struggle for their/our rights and for a full control of workplaces.

IP principles, it maintains, give it an advantage over bureaucratic unions, as employers do not know how many and who are involved. 'They cannot reach us, cannot corrupt us, because we want nothing from bosses.'[64]

IP often plays the role of left-wing opposition within existing unions, but there was no union at Chung Hong. IP activists informed interested workers how they could establish the IP group as the factory union within the framework of Polish labour law, which they had to research, having no previous practice in union formation.[65] Could IP's inexperience be compensated for in attitude? In contrast to the established unions' lack of interest in temporary workers, IP behaved differently. 'For us', explained Gosia, 'it is important to support those employed by temporary employment agencies as well, because in that way we want to overcome the divisions between workers and improve our position in relation to the employer.'[66]

To build the union, the IP group distributed leaflets and sent text messages, all but the leaders remaining anonymous to protect workers from victimization.[67] Lukasz first heard about IP through these leaflets, from a female worker on company buses and from an IP poster in the dressing room about discrimination against temporary workers.

> It mobilized us such a way we decided to put the idea of starting a union in practice. We gathered more information about Workers' Initiative, and together we reached the consensus that we like the way that union is functioning.

Mateusz added: 'we like the non-hierarchical nature of IP and its uncompromising attitude, and the absence of bureaucratic structures which could restrict our activity'.[68]

The shop-stewards who had to give their names to management were each subjected to intense personal supervision by an assigned Chinese worker and forced to write additional reports, to reduce opportunities for union organizing.[69] 'Managers follow us like shadows', Mateusz reported during this period,

> so we are not able to reach all workers and talk to them. After hours of work we return to different towns up to 100 km apart from each other. That makes it more difficult to organize a meeting outside the plant.[70]

However, the union grew. One of the organizers reckoned 'the ignorance shown by the factory management regarding the will and subjectivity of the employees worked in our favour'. The plant had never seen a significant workers' rebellion. 'Management, therefore, thought it was dealing with a fully obedient and subordinate labor force, and it did not expect our activities and the possibilities of resistance at all.'[71]

Within three months, 80 of the 200 or so workers had joined. The group put forward demands to management and prepared for industrial action.[72] An activist explained it was 'impossible to get something from the boss' and 'that's why workers were so annoyed that they decided to enter a labour dispute'.[73] The letter of demands filed on 30 April 2012 included: restoration of free transport for workers; wage increases and compensation annually in line with inflation; clear rules of promotion; end to obligatory overtime; restoration of the social fund; and consultations with the union about numbers employed through temporary employment agencies. On 10 May 2012 the workers organized a press conference in front of the factory and announced to the media they had entered a collective dispute. Workers held up banners saying 'We will not work for a bowl of rice!' and 'The collective dispute is on.'[74]

Asked in mid-May about the aims of the union, Mateusz stated they were not waiting for miracles, but insisting that wages and conditions improve, and workers be treated with dignity and respect. 'We're going to stop the ongoing intimidation and humiliation of workers and the systemic violation of our rights.' Jola mentioned how often she had wanted to shout at the employer about work at Chung Hong. 'I wanted to tell him how working here destroys my life.' Ultimately, she had never dared. Now things were different:

> Now we create a structure together that allows us to change the relationship between employers and employees.… However, if we are alone we will not make a big change. We need the support of other workers. We must act together, in solidarity. Only together we will change our situation.[75]

Temporary workers hired through agencies could not participate in the mandatory strike ballot in June, which made it more difficult for the IP union

activists to achieve their aim of overcoming the multiple divisions between permanent, limited-contract and temporary workers.[76] Temporary worker Gosia spoke of the 'big gap' between permanent and temporary workers, how 'permanent staff does not wish to establish closer relations with those on temporary contracts … because after two weeks they will be fired anyway'. Lukasz talked about the dilemma for the union. 'For a long time we wondered what to do to somehow support the temporary workers, but we have no idea. We do not know how to defend them. Recruitment through temporary agencies is a real tragedy.' By mid-May, none of the temporary employees who wanted to join the union were still working there. 'We have no contact with them', said Mateusz.[77] Also, because meetings were prohibited during the long working hours, campaigning around the strike ballot was mainly carried out on the company buses. So there were no collective discussions to transcend divisions between workers from different home towns. Nonetheless, of the 54 per cent of permanent workers who voted, 89 per cent voted for a strike, which was set to commence 2 July. However, on 28 June leading union activist Krzysztof Gazda was kicked off the company bus by security guards and given a letter dismissing him without notice.[78]

In anger, a spontaneous strike of 40 workers erupted; management declared the strike illegal and locked the strikers out of the factory, cutting off contact with workers still on the production lines, who were pressured to sign declarations that they would not participate in the strike. Due to the isolation of the spontaneous strike, the dynamic turned against the activists. The striking workers remained outside the factory. An IP activist described the conditions they endured:

> During the strike, workers couldn't get inside the factory, it was like 40 degrees or even more. It was hot, there were horrible high temperatures.… They couldn't talk with other workers … they couldn't use toilette. They made pee in front of media cause they didn't have any choice.

IP did its best to support them. It stayed with them throughout, arranged picket-lines, mobilized support from other groups and other unions, and organized a demonstration against SEZs.[79] After two weeks of the minority strike action, on 10 July, 24 of these striking workers were dismissed without notice, among them highly qualified employees who had worked at Chung Hong more than five years. Because the employer insisted they were dismissed on 'disciplinary' grounds, they could not qualify for unemployment benefits under Polish law. Some of them were single mothers.[80]

IP reacted with a public campaign against Chung Hong, working conditions in the Polish SEZs and especially against precarious forms of employment and 'junk contracts'. It sent protest letters and emails to Chung Hong and LG, raised money for the striking workers, organized rallies in other countries in front of LG offices and plants, and translated strike reports and demands into several languages, including Chinese and Korean. On 11 July the sacked workers and

their supporters marched through the SEZ from the main LG plant to the Chung Hong factory, distributing leaflets to LG workers and asking for their support. On 16 July about 30 sacked workers and supporters occupied the Warsaw office of the Polish Agency for Industrial Development for several hours, demanding that it intervene against the illegal lock-out of the workers. It did nothing, but media attention was strong, including focus on the working conditions at Chung Hong. Encouraged by the reporting, the workers held a press conference at the Polish parliament. Although the strike had not worked out as planned, the sacked workers still saw their struggle as worthwhile, an important sign that resistance was possible and as experience that could be a starting point for conflicts to come.[81]

Moreover, on 19 December 2013 the strikers were vindicated in a labour court case that awarded all the compensation (€1,500 each) demanded by three of those involved. The court ruled it was irrelevant whether or not the strike was legal, because the employer was not entitled to fire striking workers for 'disciplinary' reasons without previous notice; and workers were not obliged to follow the instructions of the employer who claimed the strike was illegal. On 30 December Gazda was reinstated by Chung Hong and the court ordered the employer pay him for the period he was unemployed, about €600 per month since June 2012. Gazda had told the court that if he lost, it would be a hardship not only to him but to all who fight and strive for workers' organization and better wages and conditions. The company had hired the union-busting law firm JP Weber, which advises and aids international investors in Poland.[82]

The strike probably failed because stronger and better-resourced unions left a well-meaning and militant, but inexperienced and under-resourced, union to fight the necessary battle on behalf of all workers, permanent and temporary. The right to strike was achieved as a result of intense workers' struggles in Poland in the 1980s and was finally introduced in 1990. However, this right is constantly violated by businesses attacking those who have often paid a high price for defending freedom of association and the right to strike. The dispute at Chung Hong was another such example.[83]

Factories without bosses and FaSinPat in Argentina

A construction worker and union organizer involved in the 1972 Sydney Opera House work-in described workers' control as 'a political strategy in which workers gain experience and also gain the knowledge that they have within themselves the ability to conduct their own affairs, the ability to run their own jobs'.[84] An innovative working-class response to unemployment has been realizing this potential by taking over control of workplaces doomed to close. Immanuel Ness and Dario Azzellini have shown how workers across time and around the world have successfully seized control of production under a vast array of circumstances; in the process they have come to understand that the working class controlling its own work is the ideal.[85]

Workers' control experiments can be seen as practical proofs of the autonomy of labour from capital, that is, the tendency of the working class to oppose the

command of capital and the ability of labour to exist independently of capital. Workers can do without a boss, but a boss cannot do without workers. In Negri's words, labour expresses its autonomy and presents itself as a social subject rather than mere object of exploitation through a process of 'self-valorization', meaning 'to put the soul to work, to understand the positive, creative, radically alternative side (of the refusal of work)'.[86] The exhilarating nature of workers' control experiences is borne out in numerous studies.[87]

Experiments with workers' control occurred in many countries during the late post-war boom, commencing with the occupation of factories in France during the turbulent events of 1968, and reaching their highpoint in the early to mid-1970s.[88] There were shared circumstances that, in each country, encouraged similar spontaneous displays of working-class audacity that were expressed in workers' control experimentation: heightened industrial militancy and a crisis in employer and state authority, variously described as an industrial relations crisis or a *political* crisis.[89]

These conditions were very different to those of *economic* crisis currently producing upsurges of workers' control experiments. These are not the result of heightened working-class industrial confidence but of economic need, even desperation. In Argentina today there are between 5,000 and 6,000 worker-managed cooperative firms providing jobs for more than 60,000 people.[90] These are part of the wave of worker-run enterprises that have sprung up around the world in response to economic recession since late last century.[91] The successful Mondragon Cooperatives in the Basque area of Spain, famed for their longevity and innovations in worker participation, have a much longer history, dating back to the 1940s.[92] However, in Europe the movement has developed primarily since the 2008 crisis, which hit southern Europe especially hard, sending unemployment soaring. Countless factories shut their gates, but workers at about 500 sites across the continent – a majority in Spain, but also in France, Italy, Greece and Turkey – refused to accept the corporate kiss of death. (In 2013 alone around 75 Spanish companies were taken over by their former employees.) By negotiation, or sometimes by occupation, they have taken production into their own hands, embracing a movement that has thrived for several years in Argentina.[93]

With Argentina leading the way in such episodes, followed by Venezuela and subsequently Spain, the Spanish terminology of 'autogestión' became common in workers' control scholarship in the early twenty-first century.[94] In the mid-to-late 1990s there were several occupations of factories in Argentina but it was the 2001 economic crisis that sparked a wave of 'fabricas recuperadas' (recuperated factories) in response to the harshly neoliberal policies pursued by President Fernando de la Rua, which caused unemployment of a quarter of the workforce. Out of these terrible conditions was born a new movement of workers who decided to take matters into their own hands. They took over control of their workplaces, restarted production and democratically decided how they would organize their work. 'Occupy, resist, produce' became the watchwords of this vibrant movement.[95] At the Chilavert recuperated printing factory, a worker described the thought process:

> When we realized that they were going to come and take the machines, well, then we had to make a decision. The time for thinking had ended and we took over the workplace.… You know that if they take the machines from you, you'll end up on the street.… Defending your source of work is a reflex.[96]

Marina Kabat argues that the factory takeover movement served as a catalyst for the working-class insurrection, the Argentinazo, that toppled the government in December 2001, but at the same time was one of its major beneficiaries; it would not have been able to sustain itself without the Argentinazo or the support of the organizations that led it.[97] She describes how the factory takeovers took on a life of their own and, as they evolved, workers grappled with how to exert workers' control within a capitalist society. Many efforts failed or were coopted; but many others succeeded in removing obstacles and developing their potential for the future, opening up new horizons for recuperated workplaces.[98] Ana Cecilia Dinerstein emphasizes the commitment of South American movements to the creation of alternative practices that prefigure life beyond capitalism. She defines autonomy as 'the art of organizing hope', shaping a reality which does not yet exist but can be anticipated by the movements' collective actions.[99] Maurizio Atzeni describes the mobilizations as spontaneous, with relevant unions playing more of a restraining than leading role, indicating the common incapacity of unions to seriously challenge the capitalist mode and relations of production.[100]

Marina Sitrin, who lived through what she describes as the 'rebellion years' of Argentina after 2001, 'those of massive self-organization and social creation', writes that if one were to ask any worker who was part of taking over and then running a workplace in common how it was possible, they would say, 'because of the community' and the 'massive solidarity' shown in the processes of recuperation. It is the workers that make the struggle, she argues, but without the support of thousands of neighbours and movement participants at the times of potential eviction, or the food and material support in the early days before production has been restarted, or later, the use of the workplaces by community groups for cultural and social centres, the recuperation would not be possible. 'In many ways a recuperation of a workplace is also the recuperation of a community.'[101] This was certainly true of the recuperated ceramics factory that became the FaSinPat cooperative, an abbreviation of the words for 'factory without a boss'.

In 2000 the workers at the Zanon factory in Neuquén, the largest porcelain plant in South America, took over Local 21 of the Sindicato de Obreros y Empleados Ceramistas de Neuquén (SOECN), an affiliate of the national ceramists' union, which had been corrupt and had colluded with the factory owners during the 1990s. SOECN is based on the logic that an isolated worker cannot effectively defend rights and interests, so 'should search among his class companions for the strength that allows one to counter, with all capacity and intelligence, attempts to curtail their legitimate rights'. It is 'a union whose working principle and method is the workers' assembly. Factory and union assemblies are the

ultimate authority that allows debate, the contestation of ideas and opinions, and the democratic resolution of each and every decision taken by the workers.' Society can only become better via class struggle, because otherwise an increasingly small minority enjoys all the economic, social and technological benefits, while the rest are condemned to over-exploitation, unemployment and low income. 'That is why SOECN recognizes, orientates and bases its practices on class struggle, under the principles of class unionism, retaining full independence from the State and its institutions, and all employer organizations.' Affirming solidarity with the poor and oppressed peoples of Latin America and the world, 'SOECN wages a consistent struggle for the legitimate interests of the working class in alliance with popular movements seeking to raise the class consciousness of workers and to achieve a society without exploiters or exploited.'[102]

This radical union demanded improved working conditions and engaged in industrial action.[103] Productivity improved, but in September 2001 Zanon declared bankruptcy and locked out its workforce. Given the 'grim national context', as those involved explained, the workers decided to take over the facilities and run them under workers' control.[104] On 1 October the workers began to occupy the factory and prevented the managers re-entering. In March 2002 they resumed production.[105]

Under workers' control, the workers from each of 56 sections of the production process, such as ovens, paste laboratory, glazing laboratory, purchases, administration, choose a coordinator in charge of production in that section, who is also part of the council, the organ of management, which includes three members from the union and which elects a general coordinator for the whole factory. The organizational dynamic of the factory proposes the periodic rotation of these posts so everyone experiences directive responsibilities.[106] The 'collective memories of FaSinPat' project believes the participatory democratic nature of the workers' control was crucial to its success:

> The recovery of a source of labour is attributed to the fact that all the workers have participated in the spaces in which policy and production decisions of the plant are made, which is a milestone in the history of the working class.[107]

In the process of recuperating their factory, the workers not only took every decision in an assembly, but they built solidarity with the local community at every stage, a community with a history of working-class radicalism. The 'collective memories' project refers to the 'culture of resistance' in Neuquén. Two of the other three ceramic factories, Stefani and Del Valle, are also self-managed.[108] To put the Zanon 'monster' back into production, the University of Comahue helped with planning, the indigenous Mapuche community provided clay, 'Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo' (a mothers' movement formed in 1977 to protest 'disappeared' children) marketed their goods, and unemployed organizations provided huge assistance. The Zanon workers did more than just recover a

business; they converted it into a laboratory of self-management and put it to the service of their community. When the National Guard attempted to reclaim the factory on 8 April 2003, the community, especially unemployed organizations, provided protection; and workers in the province stopped work. The order to reclaim the factory was withdrawn.[109] In May 2004, after 27 months of production run by the workers, the FaSinPat cooperative was established.[110] On 12 August 2009 the provincial legislature passed an Expropriation Act that officially handed the factory to the FaSinPat cooperative.[111]

Despite other eviction orders, prosecutions, intimidation and threats to family, FaSinPat has flourished. In 2001 it had about 240 workers who earned 800 pesos; by 2011, converted into the cooperative, there were 450 workers earning 4,500 pesos each. They produce 300,000 square metres of tiles per month, selling 270,000 and devoting the remainder to fund solidarity tasks. For example, in 2005 FaSinPat built a community health clinic in a local poor neighbourhood, which had been requesting one from the provincial government for 20 years. FaSinPat workers say it changed their lives, that work without a boss has given them back freedom and dignity. Gone are the double shifts, each isolated in their line and pressured by the supervisor, with permanent fear of dismissal. Exhilaration was expressed by spokesman Alejandro Lopez in 2011:

> These ten years signify an evolution of consciousness of everyone who forms part of worker self-management, at first we fought for jobs, but we came to learn class solidarity.… We are writing part of labor history, demonstrating the potential of an organised working class. Zanon not only produces ceramics, it is an international reference, it has dignified our lives, we transform ourselves into critical people.[112]

To celebrate the 10-year anniversary of the Argentinazo, in December 2011 FaSinPat workers marched with other militant labour organizations, left parties and popular movements to the Plaza de Mayo. Nustra Lucha wrote of the significance of the recuperation of factories that served as examples that workers could face capitalist crisis and run factories without bosses:

> Today, if we see the magnitude of the international capitalist crisis, the Argentina of December 2001 is no longer in the past. It is the present that is lived in Greece, Spain or Italy. So then, as 'future memories' there appear those historical experiences of workers' self-management, which continue until the present.[113]

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8 Protecting the public

> The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part … has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment".… It has resolved personal worth into exchange value.… It has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.
>
> (Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970, pp. 37–8)

The mercantilization of life

The marketization inherent in globalization is characterized by pillage of the public: privatization and corporatization of remaining public companies; and cuts to public services such as health, education and welfare. While the vast majority of citizens are adversely affected, working-class and poor people in general suffer most when the commons of society are eroded by marketization that prioritizes corporate interests. In 1980, with the assault on public spending commencing, Negri argued that the welfare state in developed countries had, from the capitalist viewpoint, become too generous and sustained proletarian power, so public spending was reoriented to undermine working-class aspirations:

> Capital, together with the forces of reformism, now imposed on public spending the productivity criteria characteristic of private enterprise. This 'productivity paradigm' was neatly timed, launched and managed through the co-optation of the trade union movement … through … the 1970s … breaking up the unity of class behaviours and smoothing the way for capitalist reorganisation.[1]

This restructuring of public spending used welfare to command labour via 'budgetary manoeuvrings', marking the transition from welfare state to 'warfare state'.[2] Though unions often collaborated, labour institutions suffered. Privatization and decreased public-sector spending weakened unions and therefore workers' capacity to resist worsening wages and conditions, because the private sector grew at the expense of the public sector, where unions were stronger.

Marketization is supervised by the usual suspects: the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF; and at regional levels by institutions such as the European Central Bank. However, even without these transnational agencies, enhanced capital mobility pressures governments, whatever their inclinations, to enact policies that favour corporations against the interests of employees and the general public. Previous chapters have examined the *direct* impacts of capital mobility on workforces. This chapter considers its *indirect* impact on workers via its effects on governments. The location decisions of corporations punish governments who defend public expenditure against neoliberal principles of fiscal rectitude.[3]

To attract and retain mobile international capital, states have reduced the 'social wage' (public health and other free public services, welfare and social security systems) to provide low taxation regimes.[4] Economics journalist Kenneth Davidson observed of Australia at the end of the twentieth century: 'It is globalisation that justifies halving the capital gains tax, which will give a $12 billion tax cut to Australian shareholders without any effort on their part. The consequent erosion of the tax base will be used to justify further cuts to education and health funding.' The widening income differential is not only obnoxious, he maintains, but 'a threat to democracy'. Governments have taken equity off the agenda and want to roll back the welfare state 'in order to create a tax regime attractive to the managers of global finance'.[5] This aspect of globalization was identified by Martin and Schumann as a 'trap' for democracy: 'if governments, on every burning issue of the future, can do no more than evoke the overwhelming constraints of the international economy, then the whole of politics becomes a spectacle of impotence, and the democratic state loses its legitimacy'.[6]

Marketization undermines democracy in other far-reaching ways. The market is fundamentally anti-democratic, conferring votes on paying capacity rather than people; so the freer play of market forces not only fails to improve most people's lives but instead brings increased levels of adversity and anxiety, loss of amenity and lack of choice. Marketization imposes particular hardships on women when cutbacks in public services place additional demands on those most likely to replace those services 'voluntarily'.

Neoliberal policies not only alter the balance away from democracy and towards the market but have been imposed without full consent of the governed, because voters were deprived of real political choice in the matter. Public opinion surveys indicate time and again that neoliberal policies lack majority support, yet major parties prefer to maintain the confidence of the markets than of the people, to please corporations rather than their constituencies. So, governing parties in the past four decades have tended to pursue free-market prescriptions and oppositions have feared to offer alternatives. The increasing commitment to free-market policies of labour and social-democratic parties has been particularly significant in the process by which political choice has been eroded.

In any case, consent is irrelevant to the neoliberal project. The relationship of corporations to democracy and democratic processes is entirely contingent. The

free market and political democracy, which Francis Fukuyama depicts as compatible components of 'the end of history',[7] are *incompatible* when the free market is taken to neoliberal extremes. Moreover, the unleashing of market forces has been accompanied not by a reduction in state control but a noticeable increase in its powers of intimidation and surveillance. Corporations are perfectly happy to operate in non-democratic environments and, when necessary, simply manipulate democratic processes to their benefit.

Marketization also threatens or obstructs the much-vaunted right to consume, despite free-market rhetoric about 'choice' as privatized entities spend more on marketing and less on maintenance. An example is the fate of Australians in country areas following the privatization of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and deregulation of the financial sector by 1983–1996 Labor governments. Between June 1991 and June 2000 almost 2,000 bank branches closed, leaving 600 country towns without banks.[8] This led to unusual alliances between bank employees and those deprived of banking services. Conservative country folk teamed up with unionized workers to voice their anger at the disappearance of banks from their communities.[9] With 47,000 jobs lost between 1991 and 1996, the Finance Sector Union (FSU) stressed the connection between effective consumer protection and employees' interests.[10] A survey conducted in mid-1998 ascertained that 90 per cent of people opposed bank closures and believed the federal government should prevent them.[11] Public opinion surveys also revealed a firm upward trend between 1996 and 2001 in positive attitudes towards trade unions.[12]

In April 2001, the FSU built a coalition with community, pensioner and consumer groups with grievances against the banks, which was supported by affected local governments. In addition to its annual wage-rise claim, the union's pattern-bargaining claim against all four major banks included a claim for more staff, fewer branch closures and better customer service.[13] *Business Review Weekly* conceded that consumer, pensioner and union groups were united in their anger that bank profitability was 'excessive' and that shareholder dividends outranked the claims of other stakeholders, and united in their conviction that increased job stress due to understaffed branches was linked with 'increasing customer anger at poor service'.[14]

In April 2002, when the National Australia Bank announced the closing of another 56 rural branches over the following 18 months, with a loss of 1,500 jobs, the FSU and the Australian Consumers' Association jointly slammed the decision. The FSU held a rally in Melbourne, promised industrial action and declared it 'won't stand by and let this happen' and that it expected to receive widespread community support, particularly from communities affected by branch closures.[15] In September 2003, the Commonwealth Bank announced the shedding of another 3,700 employees, over and above the 1,600 lost in the previous financial year. It made this announcement after reporting a $2 billion profit that financial year. The FSU condemned the cuts as an affront to staff, warned that customers would suffer and hinted at industrial action. Workplace Relations Minister Tony Abbott conceded the bank's move would 'fuel the usual sort of anger at banks'.[16] It did.

Manuel Castells argues that marketization is not simply a problem for working-class people but a problem for labour movements as political actors.

> The privatization of public agencies and the demise of the welfare state, while alleviating societies from some bureaucratic burden, worsen living conditions for the majority of citizens, break the historic social contract between capital, labor, and the state, and remove much of the social safety net, the nuts and bolts of legitimate government for common people. Torn by internationalization of finance and production, unable to adapt to networking of firms and individualization of work, and challenged by the degendering of employment, the labor movement fades away as a major source of social cohesion and workers' representation. It does not disappear, but it becomes primarily, a political agent integrated into the realm of public institutions.[17]

Far from fading away, unions that oppose marketization retain their relevance, as they are perceived as playing a valuable role in society. Marketization not only foments discontent but also fosters new forms of connectedness amongst the disgruntled.

The 'social factory' and 'community unionism'

In contrast to the gloomy approach of Castells and others, autonomist Marxism offers a perspective that provides for the possibility of labour movement regeneration in the destructive wake of marketization. Negri describes marketization as the 'real subsumption' of capital whereby capital's logic infiltrates and transforms every productive situation or relationship: 'There is no *outside* to our world of real subsumption of society under capital. We live within it, but it has no exterior; we are engulfed in commodity fetishism.' It is 'the mercantilization of life'.[18] By disseminating capitalist production relations throughout society, real subsumption demolishes the walls of workplaces. Negri's notion of the 'social factory' describes how the principles of domination and production evident in the workplace are imposed upon the wider society so that it is organized increasingly by these same principles. Capital is becoming centralized at a societal level as a *social factory*, 'to reorganise its command over *social labour time*, through a "correct administrative flow" over the entire time and space of proletarian life conditions and possibilities'.[19]

This makes all activities directly productive in immediately capitalist terms, which is functional for capitalism but also expands opportunities for opposition. As the processes engaged to valorize capital in production spill over into society, communities become a significant terrain for struggle against capital; class confrontation extends well beyond the workplace.[20] The result of capital insinuating itself everywhere is that class antagonism is refracted into a multiplicity of points of conflict. Dyer-Witheford describes how the front of struggle snakes through homes, schools, universities, hospitals and media, and takes the form

not only of workplace disputes but also of resistance to the dismantling of the welfare state and opposition to ecological despoliation.[21]

The wider society has become a battleground against capital; incessant marketization has spawned new forms of resistance. Unions in many countries spearhead mobilizations expressing the shared interests of employees with other sections of society, for example in resisting downsizing or closure of enterprises or services in a particular locality. Opposition to marketization often manifests itself in defence of 'community', hence the frequent description of union involvement in such campaigns as 'community unionism' or 'union-community coalitions'. Typically, these mobilizations involve alliances between unions, social movements, community organizations and single-issue campaigners. Whatever the relationship brokered, this trend towards union links with the wider community is born of the mutual interest of employees, local residents and consumers – most people in fact – in opposing policies and processes associated with corporate globalization that diminish the commons of societies. It is significant that unions – with resources and power at the point of production – often initiate or emerge as natural leaders within these newly minted alliances between people adversely affected by marketization.

The term 'community unionism' developed to describe the newfound propensity for unions to reach beyond workplaces to the wider community. It is at times confused with social-movement unionism, with good reason: unions inclined to social-movement unionism are likely also to embrace community unionism; and radical union activities often involve both social-movement and community-unionism strategies. Nonetheless, in this book a distinction is made: 'social-movement unionism' to describe militant, ultra-democratic, highly class-conscious and solidaristic unionism (discussed in Chapter 6); and 'community unionism' – and the variations on that terminology – for situations where unions lead coalitions of other groups to defend working-class and broader public interests against neoliberal policies.

Community unionism existed well before the coining of the term in Canada in the 1990s, where such alliances became so habitual 'community unionism' was invented to refer to the work that unions do in alliance with the community.[22] The spectacular 'Ontario Days of Action' placed Canada at the forefront of such developments in the Anglophone world. In 1996–1997, sustained collaboration between labour and community groups resulted in the mobilization of 2–3 million people in successful strikes, rallies and demonstrations as part of a wide revolt against the aggressive neoliberal policies of the Ontario government. It was the result of years of hard work that had built strong ties of solidarity and trust between the labour movement and other social movements.[23]

Judging from research on coalitions between unions and the community in North America and Australia, Carla Lipsig-Mummé observes alliances usually begin with the union and then reach out to the community.[24] An example was the late 1980s/early 1990s campaigns of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers against downsizing and reduction of services, including the closing of thousands of post offices in rural areas. The CUPW reached far beyond its normal constituency,

drawing strength from community groups reliant upon a high standard of mail delivery. These included the farmers' coalition 'Rural Dignity' as well as pensioner groups, students, the disabled and retirees.[25] (In 2015 the CUPW launched a constitutional challenge, with wide community backing, against Canada Post's move to eliminate door-to-door delivery to five million addresses in Canada over the next five years.[26])

Opponents of organized labour like to characterize unions as 'special interests' whose gains come at the expense of the rest of the community, but unions are increasingly working with other organizations rooted in the community and perceived as advocates for the common good.[27] Community unionism might simply mobilize local constituencies in defence of union objectives at a particular workplace or workplaces; but community unionism operates commonly and most powerfully where a common good is threatened by powerful partial interests and relevant unions provide leadership in campaigns of opposition. This is especially apparent in struggles to defend the public realm.

Labour geographers, such as Andrew Herod, are interested in the way unions establish 'spatial power' by organizing power from local communities through union-community relationships and renew themselves through this exercise of community-based power.[28] For example, Stephen Tufts examined 'Labor's (Re) Organization of Space' in community unionism in Canada in the radical geography journal *Antipode*; and *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* published Jane Wills' 2001 study of 'Community Unionism and Trade Union Renewal in the UK', which argued that increasing the scale of political mobilization through community unionism gave unions the power to raise questions of economic and social justice on a wider plane.[29]

Labour studies scholars became enthusiastic about union-community actions that revealed the capacity of unions to emerge as prominent community actors, mobilizing local constituencies and revitalizing central labour councils to rebuild labour's power at the grass roots.[30] Case studies of the phenomenon proliferated.[31] In general, as Amanda Tattersall noted in 2005, the rise of community unionism was presented as a significant aspect of union renewal, indicating both that union revival had occurred then contributing to further revival. In a complex typography that distinguishes various terms, she explains that 'union-community coalition' is also used to describe the trend of unions 'reaching out'; these union-community coalitions are useful mechanisms to rebuild unions' political and economic influence.[32]

Another term is 'labor-community coalition' or 'labor-community alliance' used in a 2007 collection edited by Lowell Turner, which includes studies of developments such as the re-emergence of central labour councils as focal points in coalition campaigns, and case studies of innovative union efforts to build coalitions in places such as Seattle, Buffalo, Los Angeles and San Jose.[33] According to Turner, the collection explores 'the contemporary potential of labor': the growth of social coalitions and networks at the local level indicates prospects for progressive transformation in an era dominated by neoliberal globalization with organized labour's contribution significant to a broader renewal of progressive politics and institutional reform.[34]

Tattersall developed the term 'coalition unionism' in her extensive 2010 study of the phenomenon in Chicago, Ontario and Sydney. Though unions across industrialized countries have a long history of coalition building, coalitions have become increasingly significant, because social isolation and membership decline have made it more necessary for unions to unite with other social forces to advance a broad vision of economic and social justice.

> If unions are going to survive this crisis of power, they need to reinvent themselves. A key strategy for revitalization is building 'positive-sum' coalitions, as opposed to transactional coalitions.… More mutual and shared relationships among unions and community organizations can also help revitalize unions internally, invigorating their political vision, campaign techniques, and membership engagement.[35]

In the labour studies world, interest in union-led community opposition to marketization was motivated at least in part by the potential of such actions to redress declining union densities. However, workers' resistance to marketization is grounded in concerns more fundamental than a desire to revitalize their own institutions. It is the nature of society that is at stake and the situation of working-class people especially. In many mundane and drawn-out struggles, and spectacular and spontaneous ones, workers and their organizations have played important roles in opposing marketization. The following section provides glimpses of mobilizations against privatization and the role within them of organized workers.

Privatization and its discontents

Privatization of public wealth has increased the ratio of private capital to national income in the past four decades. These transfers of public wealth to the private sector are not limited to rich countries; the same general pattern has occurred on all continents, and the most intensive privatization in the history of capital took place in former Soviet bloc countries.[36] Where there was less to privatize the process was less rapid, but remorseless nonetheless.

Privatization of public assets is a practice especially dear to corporations anxious to assume ownership of services upon which populations are particularly dependent, such as essential services of communications, health care, education, transport, housing, water, energy and waste management. Essential services under public ownership are largely immune from 'red-lining' (price/service discrimination in markets) because of universal service obligations and cross-subsidies, but deregulation and privatization of essential services encourage red-lining in the interests of shareholders, so priority and benefits flow to attractive customers whilst unattractive customers are left unserviced, underserviced or find themselves in residual markets where the poorer the service is the more expensive it becomes.[37]

Privatization also negates the democratic principle of equal rights, because privatization of services once owned in effect by everyone represents a form of

direct redistribution from all citizens to those who can afford to buy shares. Moreover, while profits are being privatized, losses are frequently socialized when citizens, via their governments, bail out collapsed private corporations such as banks. In a range of ways, privatization of public assets encapsulates neoliberalism. Yet even the classic exponents of liberalism did not favour privatization of 'natural monopolies', such as railway systems and water supplies.

Privatizations are almost always deeply unpopular, but governments of all brands persist. For example, in the early 1990s, the British Labour Party promised to reverse the unpopular sell-off of British Rail: 'any privatization of the railway system … will, on the arrival of a Labour government, be quickly and effectively … returned to public ownership', announced future Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott.[38] Elected in 1997 and with public opinion heavily against privatization of British Rail, the Blair Government not only declined to reverse its privatization but proceeded also with the unpopular privatization of London Underground infrastructure in 2003. By 2010 the failures of this 'Public–Private Partnership' were widely acknowledged.[39] An extensive independent report published in 2012, based on research funded by four unions, observed: 'The UK's privatised railway is failing society, the economy and the environment, whilst draining taxpayers' money into the pockets of private shareholders. Common sense and expert railway knowledge have ceded to a misguided private-must-be-best ethos, leaving Britain with a fragmented dysfunctional railway system that other countries view with disbelief.'[40] In 2012 and again in 2013 opinion polls found at least two-thirds of respondants favoured renationalization of British Rail.[41] In 2014 lone Greens MP Caroline Lucas introduced a private member's bill, doomed to fail but popular outside parliament, to renationalize the railways.[42] The privatizations detested by majorities have been brought about by what Tariq Ali terms 'the extreme centre', the political system that has grown up under neoliberalism, where there are two political parties with different clientele but carrying out the same policies.[43] Jeremy Corbyn's support for renationalization is one of the many ways he captured the popular support that propelled him into the Labour Party leadership in September 2015, to the consternation of the extreme centre.

Unions have often been crucial in successful campaigns to protect public ownership. In the last two decades of the twentieth century when privatization became endemic, there were widespread workers' struggles to defend nationalized industries and services. David Bacon has shown how strong these movements were in the 1990s in India, Mexico, Russia and China.[44] India was an especially inspiring case and stands in contrast with neighbouring Pakistan, where unions did not effectively oppose privatizations. In India, according to Christopher Candland, the union-organized protests against privatization were so effective they led to reversals of government privatization decisions. In the publicly owned steel industry, for example, the unions staged a strike throughout the entire sector that was so strong the Congress government withdrew the privatization bill from the Lok Sabha and instead decided to provide the necessary finance to modernize the industry. By the end of the 1990s, the government had

not been able to privatize a single central public-sector unit.[45] Katrin Uba agrees that trade unions played a leading role in the Indian anti-privatization mobilizations between 1990 and 2003. She notes that two-thirds of the actions were strikes, involving an average of two million workers, backed up by demonstrations of similar proportions.[46] Solidarity actions were important. For instance, when thousands of workers at India's state power company went on strike in 2000 to prevent privatization of electricity generation and distribution in Uttar Pradesh, they were supported in Indian ports by longshore workers also stopping work.[47]

State Owned Enterprises are still the dominant form in important industries in China, but a huge number of privatizations have nonetheless occurred. For example, in the steel industry, many workers have lost their jobs with large-scale layoffs resulting from privatizations in the past couple of decades. By and large, Chinese trade unions have been ineffective in representing workers' interests under such pressures. In 2009 workers at the Tonghua Steel Mill in Jilin Province and the Linzhou Steel Company in Puyang took anti-privatization actions independently of their official unions, even though many of the workers involved were union members. In both cases, workers were desperately anxious to defend their livelihoods as state employees and became active when privatization plans were revealed. Unfortunately, tempers flared to such an extent during the Tonghua struggles that the general manager was killed. He was paid three million yuan the previous year, while company retirees were receiving as little as 200 yuan per month. This violent action was supported by many workers at the steel mill, an outbreak of anger that frightened local government officials into making concessions to the workers. This victory inspired the workers at the Linzhou plant but during their struggle against privatization they merely locked up a local government official for 90 hours. They too were successful in preventing the planned privatization.[48]

Tattersall tells how Canadian unions were significant in protecting Canada's universal health care system, Medicare, which was threatened by political lobbies, such as employer think-tanks and pharmaceutical and private insurance companies, pushing for privatization. In Ontario in the 1990s the neoliberal assault proceeded by the usual means: reductions in public-health expenditure caused long waiting lists for surgeries, cancer treatment centres were cancelled and forward planning ceased. In this context of manufactured health-system crisis, the Ontario Federation of Labour resolved in 1995 to re-launch the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC). The OHC was spearheaded by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), a 'social justice union' with a history of engaging in coalition work, particularly against privatization. The OHC involved other unions and a wide variety of community organizations including seniors' associations, the left-nationalist Council of Canadians and approximately 35 local health coalitions around the province run by local union officials and volunteers.[49]

CUPE led the way in persuading the OHC to take on a radical canvassing campaign: door-knocking, petitions and lawn signs in defence of Medicare, adapting electoral tactics to a non-electoral situation. Full-time coordinator

Natalie Mehra said this strategy 'had never been done, it was a totally new way to organise and broaden support'. However, it was 'not a difficult leap', according to CUPE official Doug Allan, given the 'obvious connection between jobs and community services'.[50] Money for the campaign was provided by unions. The CAW successfully lobbied GM, Ford and DaimlerChrysler to publicly support Medicare, due to employers' direct interest in publicly funded health care over health care as an employer cost, as in the USA. Union leaders used their economic power and workplace relationships to leverage an alliance with businesses to support the campaign. OHC unions undertook workplace education, with organizers and stewards distributing materials at hospitals during April and May 2002. The OHC used strong networks to upscale the campaign to a nation-wide one, with the Canadian Health Coalition forming after the Ontario campaign was underway. The OHC collected 170,000 signatures on the petition, door-knocked over 250,000 houses, and 57 municipal councils passed supportive motions.[51]

With the wholesale privatization threat overcome, the OHC moved on to fight Public Private Partnerships (P3s). At the provincial elections in mid-2003, the OHC campaigned with a 14-foot wooden horse to depict P3s as a Trojan horse threatening to destroy public health care from within. Between 2004 and 2006 the OHC used the tactic of community-run plebiscites to demonstrate opposition to individual P3 hospitals. These generated media attention and public awareness of the P3 issue. All the plebiscites were won by large percentages; at Niagara 98 per cent voted against the proposed P3. Though individual P3s have proceeded, the OHC succeeded in articulating and mobilizing the support necessary to save Medicare. In leading this coalition, CUPE met the needs of its members in concert with the needs of others. The formation of a positive-sum coalition with other groups, according to Tattersall, expanded CUPE's ability to advocate and engage its membership in ways that increased CUPE's power and resources.[52]

In the USA, Jobs with Justice, created in 1987 under AFL-CIO auspices, brought together over 1,500 organizations in 25 states and achieved significant successes in campaigns, supported by mass community mobilizations, to defend community health clinics threatened by privatization and budget cuts.[53] An example of a union-led campaign to save public health provision is the defence of the Los Angeles public hospital system in 2002 when the County Department of Health Services presented plans to dismantle the public health care system that served nearly three million uninsured residents. The LA Coalition for Healthy Communities' fight-back campaign was led by SEIU Local 660. With over 20,000 union members in public health and at least 5,000 jobs on the line, SEIU 660 realized the campaign must mobilize all stakeholders, including patients, patient advocacy groups, doctors, political leaders, community groups and other unions.[54] SEIU 660 quickly became the backbone of the Coalition for Healthy Communities, which engaged in grassroots organizing, mobilizing and educating, explaining to the public: 'We are united in the Coalition for Healthy Communities because we believe the LA County public health system can and must be saved.' This was essential, it maintained,

> to ensure that every community resident has access to quality health services, regardless of ability to pay or legal status; that our families are protected from illness; that our communities are strong and healthy; and that the system is adequately funded.[55]

The Coalition for Healthy Communities' most remarkable success was the November 2002 ballot-initiative victory – Measure B – the first property-tax increase in California in over 20 years, to generate an extra $168 million a year for LA County trauma and emergency services. Hall and Schaefer argue the campaign showed organized labour was well suited to play a significant leadership role in helping to move a progressive agenda around health care.[56]

A current health care battleground is defence of the British National Health Service against Cameron Government attempts to privatize it by stealth, as in Ontario, amidst a neoliberal propaganda war of claims that the NHS is unaffordable, the private sector is cheaper and more efficient than the NHS, GPs will be in the driving seat, patients will have more choice, there will be less bureaucracy and communities will have greater control.[57] How do unions mount successful campaigns to protect publicly owned industries? The following case studies around water, oil and railways look for clues.

The water wars in Bolivia and beyond

The marketization of water service delivery opened up new territory globally for capital accumulation through the framing of water as a commodity.[58] With more and more privatizations and attempts at privatization, the notion of water as 'a fundamental source of life, as a human right and commons' has become a vital issue this century.[59] A well-known success against the water privatization trend, in which workers' organizations played an important role, occurred around the turn of the millennium in Bolivia's third-largest city, Cochabamba in the Andes with a population of 600,000. An important leader in this campaign was Oscar Olivera, former shoe-factory worker and executive secretary of the Federation of Factory Workers in Cochabamba, who wrote a book about the struggle, *Cochabamba! Water Rebellion in Bolivia*.

Until 1986 Bolivia had one of the strongest and most united union movements in South America, rooted in extensive state infrastructure that provided at least 60 per cent of the country's employment. With the economy dependent on four mines that produced 25 per cent of total revenues, the government during the early 1980s offered repeated voluntary redundancies to miners then privatized the mines. In September 1986 the union organized a 200 kilometre March for Life from the high plateau to La Paz, involving thousands of miners, their families and supporters. Olivera describes it as 'a protest against the destruction of a protective public sector which recognized a strong union'. The march was stopped by soldiers and the people demobilized. The government began to destroy the union movement and a new era of privatizations began.[60]

In 1997 World Bank officials told Bolivia's president that $600 million in international debt relief was dependent on Cochabamba putting its public water system into privatized corporate hands.[61] In September 1999, in a closed-door process with just one bidder, Bolivian officials leased off Cochabamba's water until 2039 to Aguas del Tunari, a consortium led by Californian engineering corporation Bechtel.[62] After rate increases of up to 200 per cent and billing of people with no access to water on the grounds they should pay for a future service, a coalition was formed of workers and their unions, artisans, peasants, street-vendors, neighbourhood organizations, local governments and others against water privatization. La Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida (Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life) challenged the privatization. All the unions joined. Olivera, leader of the confederation of factory workers' unions, became one of its major spokespersons. 'Companeros', Olivera would tell crowds: 'It's become a fight between David and Goliath, between poor people and a multinational corporation. They have a lot of money, and they want to take away our water.' Coordinadora objectives were to prevent water from becoming a commodity and guarantee respect for traditional customs and forms of water-use in the countryside.[63] 'All of the people were united against the water company', Olivera recalls. At the first mobilization on 28 December 1999, 20,000 people protested in the central plaza to demand the government revise the water contract. It announced there would be a general strike and blockade of the roads.[64]

Early in January 2000, Coordinadora organized this citywide general strike and road blocks, which shut down Cochabamba for four days.[65] Important in this campaign were retired factory workers under Olivera's direction, piece-workers, sweatshop employees and street-vendors.[66] The police used tear-gas for the first time in 18 years but, according to Olivera, 'the people stayed strong, and maintained the blockade'. The government signed an agreement with Coordinadora on 14 January, promising to revise the law and the privatization contract. For two months, while waiting for these promises, no-one paid their water bills and people reinforced the blockade with logs. On 4 February Coordinadora organized a peaceful seizure of the plaza. People came from four directions with flowers and bands playing. 'The government and the elites were afraid', says Olivera. A thousand police appeared and two days of fighting ensued with 175 protesters injured. On 26 March Coordinadora conducted a popular consultation in the Cochabamba area in which 50,000 voted, with 96 per cent wanting the contract with Aguas del Tunari cancelled.[67]

With continuing protests and strikes, in April 2000 Coordinadora leaders called for a cancellation of the privatization contract altogether and announced the 'Final Battle', an April general strike and highway blockade that would not be lifted until Bechtel was gone and a new law enacted to guarantee water rights.[68] Olivera describes the indefinite road blockade from 4 April as similar to the earlier one but better organized. 'The people prepared for it like for a war … barbed wire fences, things to puncture tires, masks, everything.'[69] Olivera was arrested but released the following day. The state government declared it wanted

to break the privatization contract but the national government objected and announced a 'state of siege' on 8 April to protect law and order, arguing this was because access-roads to the cities were blocked, people stranded and short of food, and chaos beginning to take hold in other cities. During martial law, 20 union and civic leaders were arrested, many protesters injured and two people killed while resisting removal of a roadblock, although the military commander refused to obey orders to shoot people. Because of the seriousness of the anti-privatization resistance, the company announced it had decided to leave the country 'voluntarily'. Coordinadora reached agreement with a government delegation, drafted a memo for the government to break the contract on the grounds that the company had abandoned the country, and faxed it to La Paz; the government faxed it back signed on 10 January 2001.[70]

On Monday 11 January Congress enacted all the changes requested by Coordinadora; the 8-day blockade was lifted the following day; on Wednesday 12 January control of water returned to the town, with Coordinadora represented in its management.[71] Coordinadora was determined to ensure that water be provided to everyone at reasonable prices, with social control over the reconstituted public enterprise made responsible for supply.[72] With Bechtel's officials fleeing Bolivia, the water-privatization contract cancelled and a publicly controlled water company reinstalled, the Bolivian water revolt became 'an international symbol of popular resistance to global economic rules imposed from above', according to Jim Schultz, executive director of the Democracy Center in Cochabamba.[73] Manuel de la Fuente, Professor of Economics at the university in Cochabamba, claimed the water war showed that people were tired of enterprises that make enormous profits at the expense of the population. 'It is now possible to dream of greater justice in Bolivia.'[74]

In addition to changing the law that had converted water into a commodity to pave the way for privatization, the struggle also forced the government to pass a subsequent law classifying water as a public good and respecting traditional water-management practices.[75] Olivera draws three lessons from the victory: it was the common people who brought justice; individualism, isolation and fear disappeared under the spirit of solidarity that came out of the self-mobilization of the people, who provided all the elements of a well-coordinated resistance; and the people want and must have a government that takes democracy and public opinion seriously and does not just take into account the interests of international financiers and their neoliberal agenda.[76] On 23 April 2002 Olivera led 125 protesters to the San Francisco headquarters of Bechtel; and its officials met with him to discuss Bechtel's $25 million compensation claim. On 19 January 2006 Bechtel agreed with the Bolivian government to drop any financial claims.[77]

This victory strengthened the mood and movement against privatizations in general. Early in 2002 more than 500 miners staged a series of blockades along main highways demanding that the Huanuni tin mine and the Vinto foundry be transferred back to the state-run Bolivian Mining Company, partially privatized in 2000. In June the government agreed to take back control of both. Activist

Leny Olivera stated optimistically: 'The humble people are the majority and are more powerful than multinational corporations.'[78] A wave of similar popular mobilizations aided the rise and 2005 electoral victory of socialist party President Evo Morales, who had supported the water protests as a Congressman. However, Jeffery Webber argues Morales' economic policies did not dismantle the status quo he was meant to replace. Drawing on dozens of interviews with activists, union militants and indigenous leaders, Webber registers the impatience of those who struggled for a more definitive rejection of the social order imposed on South America by the IMF and World Bank than Morales provided.[79]

In neighbouring Colombia, public service union Sintraemcali fought a long battle against the privatization of Emcali, the public company that provided water, energy and telecom services to two million people in and around Cali, and good jobs and wages to nearly 3,000 workers. On Christmas Day 2001 the workers, virtually 100 per cent unionized, occupied the administrative tower of Emcali. They demanded guarantees against privatization along with repair of the public systems neglected in preparation for privatization. After 35 days' occupation of the tower, the union reached an agreement with the government on 29 January 2002. This was a huge victory for the union and the community, but the price was high: after the occupation, two union activists were assassinated and two union leaders narrowly escaped abduction.[80]

There have been repeated battles waged by unions and other movements against the privatization of water. In South Africa water privatization has resulted in disempowered communities and led to water shortages, particularly for poor and black people. Community protests and social movements have become a normalized part of everyday life, according to Vasna Ramasar. These practices of democratic voice and resistance have been met with violent responses from the state, as at Marikana, suggesting the 'poors' of South Africa remain as peripheral to national development as in the apartheid past. 'It remains to be seen whether these spaces of resistance can be scaled up to a collective response that re-establishes water as a human right as more important than water as an economic good.'[81]

More successfully, the struggle for public water in Italy culminated in the spectacular referendum victory of June 2011 in which water privatization was opposed by more than 95 per cent of the 57 per cent of the Italian electorate who voted. Although re-nationalizations have not occurred, this result stopped any further privatizations of water. Funzione Pubblica, the largest Italian union federation organizing public-sector workers, strongly supported this anti-privatization movement from 2004 onwards, cooperating with a broad array of movements, including Catholic groups, in a campaign that framed the issue in terms of human rights, the commons and democracy against competing frames referring to technical aspects or governance of the water sector. Despite the ambivalence of unions representing workers in the privatized water companies, the Italian General Confederation of Labour came down on the anti-privatization side.[82]

The success in Italy encouraged the European Federation of Public Service unions in 2012 to launch the first European Citizens' Initiative on water as a human right, 'Right2Water', which has collected millions of signatures across Europe. German public-sector union Ver.Di was especially active in contributing to the 1.9 million signatures collected by September 2013. 'Right2Water' helped inspire the union of water workers in Thessaloniki in Greece, strongly backed up by European public-sector unions' social media postings, to spearhead the campaign that resulted in a referendum on 18 May 2014 in which 98 per cent of votes cast were against privatization of Thessaloniki water. In June the Greek privatization agency announced it was shelving the privatization of Greek water companies.[83]

In Ireland the corporatization of Irish Water has prompted furious opposition from radical unions. In 2010 the Irish government consented to IMF-imposed austerity measures, which included a pledge to 'move towards full cost-recovery in the provision of water services'. Water services in Ireland have long been paid for by progressive taxation, not user fees, and there is a tradition of strong resistance to 'double taxation'. Rapidly corporatizing itself in anticipation of privatization, Irish Water awarded the contract to install water meters to Ireland's wealthiest citizen. Ireland's workers and other poor people suffering hugely from the post-GFC recession were incensed further by reports early in 2014 that Irish Water planned to spend €85 million on consultant fees. By September the 'Right2Water' campaign was in full swing. A protest march in October attracted 100,000 in Dublin, equivalent to a million in Spain. In working-class neighbourhoods, especially in Dublin, local groups occupied spaces in front of homes to prevent installation of meters.[84]

Prominent in instigating and developing Right2Water were the unions Mandate, which organizes retail workers, and the Irish section of Unite. Mandate explained its 2014 Biennial Delegate Conference voted to launch a campaign against the recently imposed water charges 'to mobilise workers and citizens across the country', because: 'We are calling for our politicians to recognise that water is a human right and that your access to water should not depend on your income.' Mandate pointed out water charges would remove up to €450 million from the local economy, impacting hardest on the retail sector, and may cost up to 2,500 jobs.

> This unfair, regressive tax will hit the lowest paid and most vulnerable hardest. We already pay for water through our general taxation system which is fair and progressive – meaning those who can afford to pay the most do so. Our members wish for it to remain that way.[85]

Other unions that affiliated to Right2Water included the Communications Workers' Union, the Civil and Public Services Union and the Operative Plasterers and Allied Trades Society of Ireland.[86]

The radical stance of unions behind Right2Water distinguished them from unions close to the Labour Party, which was implicated in austerity measures,

including the corporatization and impending privatization of Irish Water, and therefore rapidly alienating working-class supporters. A 2015 survey of those involved in the campaign indicated clearly that opposition to privatization and austerity were major motivating factors and 92 per cent said they would not pay water charges.[87] On 15 July 2015, the *Irish Times* reported that Irish Water had collected less than half of water charges owed. Right2Water mobilizations in late summer 2015 continued strongly and the Labour vote has collapsed as an election looms.[88]

In mid-2015, the five 'Right2Water Unions' issued a joint statement of ideal policies for a new government, which outlines mandatory water conservation measures and subsidised water saving devices, increased investment in water infrastructure, and proclaims that water is a human right, essential for life and for all our human needs: 'As such, water provision and sanitation should not be subject to the profit motive or the free market and should be made available to all, free at the point of use, and on the basis of need, not means.' The government of their hopes and dreams would replace Irish Water PLC with a single national water and sanitation board and enshrine a new article in Bunreacht Na h'Eireann (the Constitution): 'The Government shall be collectively responsible for the protection, management and maintenance of the public water system. The Government shall ensure in the public interest that this resource remains in public ownership and management.'[89]

The emphasis on water as a commons focuses public attention on the motives and consequences of privatization; and promotes community-wide popular mobilizations that not only prevent privatizations but raise questions about other essential services. Ultimately, such anti-corporate politicization points beyond mere resistance towards postcapitalist transformation, according to Riccardo Cavallo: the 'collective government of the commons' could be a new form of class struggle, a revolutionary way out of the suffocating logic of private property.[90]

The oil war in Iraq

In Iraq from 2003 the occupiers aspired to expand oil production through foreign investment to give multinational corporations the primary role in running the oil industry, unlike its neighbours which, like Iraq, had nationalized oil industries. Greg Muttitt describes the destabilizing influence this had on Iraq, increasing internal tensions and corruption, because a 'resource curse' is best averted by common ownership and careful government regulation. The Iraq oil industry had achieved great successes after its nationalization in the 1970s and most Iraqis wanted oil to remain in public hands. However, this attitude was dismissed by occupation officials and Western commentators as old-fashioned, ideological or even Ba'athist.[91]

The US occupation continued 1987 Saddam-era legislation that outlawed all unions in the public sector. Despite being illegal, oilworkers' unionization developed rapidly under capable leaders such as Abdullah Jabbar al-Maliki,

founding member of the oilworkers' trade union in the South Oil Company in 2003, and Faleh Abood Umara, general secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions from 2003. Oilworkers' unionization was encouraged by the General Federation of Iraqi Workers (GFIW), a trade union confederation formed out of the remnants of the Saddam-era unions together with the federation aligned with the Iraq Communist Party. Despite the immense legal restrictions, by the end of 2005, 300,000 oil and other public-sector workers were unionized.[92]

A major incentive to organization was the desire to prevent oil privatization. In May 2005 the General Union of Oil Employees, which was resolutely opposed to US occupation, the former regime and plans to privatize Iraq's oil industry, organized an anti-privatization conference in Basra. It invited other unionists and civil-society activists to assemble 25–26 May at the Institute of Petroleum. Six papers from Basra University professors were discussed, international contributions heard and a tour of oil-sector workplaces conducted. International solidarity for the conference was organized by the UK-based Iraq Occupation Focus.[93]

In 2004 American unionists in US Labor Against the War (USLAW) had organized a delegation of US trade unionists to go to Iraq to build bridges with Iraqi unionists. In 2005 USLAW arranged a return delegation of Iraqi unionists. Representing the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq, and the General Union of Oil Employees, they toured 25 cities in the USA. American unionists stated: 'We are committed to seeing that our government does not try to buy and sell all of your industries to corporations.' They described US economic policy in Iraq as 'an experiment in privatization, it is what we are fighting here, and what our country is doing in Iraq is, it's trying to privatize an entire country'. A movie about these tours, *Meeting Face to Face: the Iraq–U.S. Solidarity Tour*, shows National Guards in Iraq attacking striking workers with bayonets and arresting them.[94]

At the end of the US tour, on 26 June 2005 a joint statement by these Iraqi labour movement leaders and USLAW was issued, 'in the spirit of international solidarity and respect for labor rights around the world … opposition to war and occupation and for the right of self-determination of nations and peoples'. It argued the war was fought for oil and regional domination, in violation of international law, justified by laws and deception without consultation with the Iraqi people. Maintaining that 'the national wealth and resources of Iraq belong to the Iraqi people', it firmly opposed privatizations: 'We are united in our opposition to the imposition of privatization of the Iraqi economy by the occupation, the IMF, the World Bank, foreign powers and any force that takes away the right of the Iraqi people to determine their own economic future.'[95] International union movement support for the Iraqi oilworkers' campaign against privatization was also promoted by Basra oilworkers' union UK representative Ewa Jasiewicz, who had been an industrial activist and journalist in Iraq 2003–2004.[96]

In December 2006 18 Iraqi union leaders met in Amman in Jordan to discuss the draft Iraqi Oil Law. Vowing to fight this law the USA was pushing in Baghdad, they issued a statement that described privatization as a 'red line that

may not be crossed'.[97] Ibrahim Radhi of the refinery union expressed the sentiments of Iraqi union activists: 'Privatisation would be unjust and a denial of the rights of the Iraqi people.'[98] Iraqi Oil Labour Union head Hassan Juma posted on the union's website a speech calling on the government to consult with Iraqi oil experts and 'ask their opinion before sinking Iraq into an ocean of dark injustice'. In addition to objecting to oil privatizations, union leaders argued that transferring ownership to foreign corporations would give a further pretext to continue US occupation on the grounds that those companies needed protection. On 8 February 2007 Iraqi unions sent a letter to President Jalal Talbani urging him to reconsider the privatizations (coyly called 'production-sharing agreements' in the draft oil law): 'They will re-imprison the Iraqi economy and impinge on Iraq's sovereignty since they only preserve the interests of foreign companies.'[99]

Raids on GFIW headquarters by American and Iraqi forces on 23 and 25 February 2007 occurred just as the US-backed Iraqi cabinet approved the new oil law specifying that up to two-thirds of Iraq's known reserves would be developed by multinational corporations under contracts lasting 15 to 20 years. On 27 February an InterPress Service article, 'New Oil Law Seen as Cover for Privatization', observed that these raids indicated unions were playing an important role in opposition to the new law. Authorities were well aware that the oil unions, among the law's strongest opponents, could potentially disrupt production. Hassan Jum'ah Awwad Al-Asadi, head of the largest union group, the Federation of Oil Unions, stated his intention to mobilize 23,000 members against the legislation: 'We want a new, different law, which will be in the interests of Iraqis. If there is no solution we can stop production, stop exports.' He told union members at a conference in Basra on the oil law early in February 2007: 'We strongly warn all the foreign companies and foreign capital in the form of American companies against coming into our lands under the guise of production-sharing agreements.' Hassan Jum'ah threatened strike action against the law and foreign companies that tried to operate under it.[100]

Significantly, not just USLAW but also the AFL-CIO openly supported the series of anti-privatization strikes in 2007.[101] These strikes, publicly supported by Iraqi oil experts who favoured continuing public ownership of oil resources, were successful in securing commitments from politicians to oppose privatization. Because this campaign was clearly having an impact, mobilizing the strong public sentiment against privatization, government crackdowns on oil unions intensified.[102] Muhammad Zaki of the petrochemical union commented: 'We expected everything when we started the union: arrest, death, losing our jobs?'[103]

Corporations did not get the production-sharing agreements they desired; the small number of hybrid contracts awarded in 2009 without parliamentary approval are technically illegal and can be revoked.[104] Although their room for manoeuvre was constrained by government anti-union repression and multinational oil corporations' union-busting activities, oilworkers' unions led the resistance to the Iraq state being reduced to a global oil pump. They protected the rights and broader interests of Iraqis by preventing the USA from achieving

much of what it wanted.[105] Accordingly, repression has continued. For example, around May 2011 Jamal Abdul-Jabbar, an oil and gas workers' union leader, was forcibly relocated in an attempt to destroy the union.[106]

As their struggle continued over the years, international union movement support escalated.[107] Muttitt observed: 'Trade unions struggle to defend their tenuous position in Iraq; their counterparts in Europe, the USA and elsewhere work to strengthen their efforts.'[108] In November 2013, charges filed by the South Oil Company and the Ministry of Oil against Hassan Jum'ah for 'harming the interests of the state' by organizing oilworkers' strikes against privatization were thrown out by a court in Basra. Hassan Jum'ah issued a statement thanking USLAW, the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center, and other unions and labour federations around the world for their support and solidarity. He had told a USLAW forum in September that the Iraqi oilworkers' union had a clear position that opposed the licensing of foreign corporations' extraction of oil and production of oil in Iraq: 'this is called throwing away the resources of future generations'.[109]

The railways war in South Korea 2013–2014

On 9 December 2013 workers employed by Korail, the government-owned Korean Railroad Corporation, commenced a nationwide strike against restructuring and privatization proposals, and the lack of public dialogue around them despite election promises made by President Park Geun-hye. They were members of the Korean Railway Workers Union (KRWU), affiliated with the ITF.[110] The government and Korail declared the strike illegal, even though the union was complying with the minimum services requirement prescribed by national legislation. Nearly 6,000 of the 8,500 striking workers were immediately stripped of their railway company rank in the first step towards disciplinary actions; and around 200 KRWU officers had charges pressed against them by Korail.[111]

The ITF sprang into action, organizing an international Action Day on 10 December that resulted in instant trade union demonstrations at South Korean diplomatic offices in dozens of countries around the world, including Thailand, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, Japan, Romania, the UK, Turkey, India, Belgium, Bulgaria, Burma, Japan, Norway, the Philippines and Taiwan. In countries without South Korean legations, rallies were held in union halls and workplaces. For example, members of the Nigeria Union of Railway Workers held a banner at their Lagos workplace that stated: 'Privatisation is Evil. Nigerian Union of Railway Workers say no to privatization of Korean Railways.' The ITF reported on its campaign website that 'the strike is going strong and the morale of the workers is high, thanks to the global mobilisation of trade union solidarity'.[112]

A high-level ITF delegation, together with affiliates from Norway, New Zealand, the UK and Thailand, visited South Korea to support the strike, insisting the strike was legal and railway workers had the right to strike against the

government's rail privatization and restructuring policy. It stated on 16 December that: the government and Korail were escalating the conflict by use of strike-breakers and these unqualified drivers and conductors had caused accidents, one of them involving death of a passenger; anti-union tactics were jeopardizing the safety of the national railway system; and arrests of strike leaders were a grave violation of international labour standards. It pointed out that the ILO had on repeated occasions criticized South Korea's laws and called on its government to respect freedom of association.[113] ITF inland transport secretary Mac Urata, part of the ITF delegation, described privatization as 'a global problem', with workers in France currently also striking over the issue, but pointed out the extremity of the Korean case due to the extent of government repression against strikers, such as dismissals and criminal charges. 'The Korean government's attitude must change, and Tuesday's actions send a strong message to the South Korean government – respect your workers, respect their rights.'[114]

The delegation stressed the strength in the KRWU. ITF railway section chair Oystein Aslasken observed: 'This union is organised and disciplined in this struggle. Their unity is strong. They have allies in the labour movement as well as in the wider civil society and political parties, as demonstrated by the successful rally on 14 December in Seoul.' Aslasken called on the government and Korail to resume negotiations with the KRWU, warning that failure to do so would result in the ITF stepping up its campaign by calling on rail companies to review their contracts with Korean companies, jeopardizing Korean exports of rail products such as Rotem rolling stocks. It added that the ITF would work collectively 'with the wider international trade union movement and beyond' to campaign for the guarantee of workers' rights in South Korea to bring justice to its working men and women. With the ITUC and GUFs, it would use international forums, such as the ILO and OECD, to demand the government of South Korea comply with international labour standards and guidelines. Part of this effort would be for the ITF to associate with the KRWU in filing an ILO complaint to the Freedom of Association Committee on the illegal actions taken by South Korean authorities and Korail against the KRWU's national strike.

> The government of South Korea and its anti-union behaviours are in the spotlight of international communities.… The on-going attacks against the legal rail strike are just the latest example of their continual disregard and disrespect for the basic workers' rights as enshrined in the core conventions of the ILO.[115]

Following earlier raids on KRWU offices, on 22 December, 4,600 riot police and 900 Swat Squad officers raided the headquarters of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in a five-hour operation, confiscating union property, including documents and computer files. Pepper spray was used, hundreds were injured, and 120 protesters and KCTU leaders detained. The ITF described this raid as 'a disproportionate display of anti-union aggression', which contravened internationally recognized labour standards and violated civil rights. The

ITF delegation in Seoul stressed at its press conference at the National Assembly that such further action would be heavily condemned by members of Global Unions.[116]

Global actions continued for the duration of the strike. Countless affiliates of the ITF and other unions abroad sent protest letters to the government and Korail; and e-protests included a LabourStart campaign signed by thousands, calling on the government and Korail to respect railway workers' right to strike. There were continued protests at Korean diplomatic offices worldwide after the raid on the KCTU office, indicating the global significance of the Korean railway workers' struggle against privatization.[117]

For example, on 24 December, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions organized a demonstration in front of the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea to support the Korean railway workers' right to strike.[118] The same day, the Confederate of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DISK) organized a solidarity demonstration in front of the Korean Consulate in Istanbul. DISK's Charter supports state ownership of essential industries and services. It also counsels an internationalist perspective: 'The evaluation of national and international events from a working class and scientific point of view is necessary for enhancing the revolutionary level and awareness of workers.'[119] DISK President Kani Beko announced at the demonstration: 'If Korean government invites Korean workers to a fight, we also accept that invitation and that fight will take place every corner of the world where there are workers.' During the demonstration, workers chanted slogans such as 'Long live international solidarity' and 'Korean workers are not alone.'[120]

Korean supporters continued to mobilize in huge numbers under the slogan 'I am not fine'. Wearing such a sign was a simple way to show solidarity for the railway strike and labour movement, and express dissatisfaction with the government. Korean posters and slogans usually read, 'How are you? I am not fine!' followed by the reason one is 'not fine'. The Facebook page in support of the strike suggested examples to put in the blank space: 'stop rail privatization', 'arrests of union members', 'arrest warrants for KRWU leaders', 'raids on union offices', 'labor repression', etc.[121]

On 24 December, Global Unions called on President Park to intervene to resolve the dispute. South Korea had committed itself to respect international labour standards upon its accession to the OECD. The ITF, along with the ITUC pointed out its failure to fulfil this commitment, in addition to flouting its obligations to the ILO. The ITF and ITUC urged the government and Korail to stop their anti-union tactics, drop charges against union officials and enter into talks with the KRWU about restructuring. 'Both organisations and their members are committed to continue working collectively with their allies in the international trade union movement and beyond to bring justice to the working men and women in South Korea.'[122]

However, in an especially provocative action, on 27 December the government established and licensed a stock company to run the new Suseo KTX line. It rushed the process through in a manner the KRWU and its parent body, the

Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU), described as 'cowardly and legally questionable'. The KRWU filed a suit for the cancellation of the Suseo KTX company's operating license.[123] In the circumstances, the union felt it must continue the strike. On 28 December, there was a successful nationwide general strike called by the KCTU, combined with a protest rally in Seoul in support of the strikers, attended by 100,000 people.[124]

Strong support on the ground in South Korea combined with concerted international labour movement pressure – and the promise to maintain the momentum – forced the government and Korail to back down from its hardline position. On 29 December the standing committee on land infrastructure and transport in the National Assembly agreed with the KRWU to establish a subcommittee on railway development and to allow the KRWU to participate in an advisory capacity. The subcommittee would prepare a short-term plan to prevent privatization of Suseo-KTX and longer term plans around comprehensive railway development.[125]

Following this agreement, the KRWU, KPTU and KCTU decided to end the strike. The KRWU strikers returned to work on 31 December after 23 days on strike. The KRWU and KPTU thanked unions worldwide for their solidarity action and acknowledged 'the mass support from Koreans from all walks of life'. A KRWU/KPTU joint statement issued on 1 January 2014 declared: 'Through the strike, the struggle against rail privatization became a struggle of the whole Korean labor movement as demonstrated by the KCTU's general strike on December 28 and the solidarity action by other KPTU and KCTU affiliates.' Moreover, the strike 'received deep and widespread support among Koreans from all walks of life'. Beyond simply sending moral support, the statement emphasized that average Korean citizens actively participated in the struggle by sending financial and material contributions, posting hand-written signs with the slogan 'I am not fine!' around the country, making their opposition heard through social media and coming out in large numbers to protest. 'This massive public support is an important foundation for the continued struggle against privatization of the railway and other public services.' The statement acknowledged the two ITF missions in Korea during the strike provided tremendous support to KRWU members, enabling them to persist in the strike and to stress the importance of social dialogue on rail policy to the government and public. 'While the strike has ended, our struggle must continue. The national assembly subcommittee will be a tool in the political fight against privatization, but action on the ground is essential given the obstinacy of the Park Geun-hye administration.' Repression against the KRWU had not disappeared; the raid on the KCTU office on 22 December made it clear that the government's attack had grown to one against the entire labour movement. 'Support from the international community will be all the more important at this juncture.' The KRWU planned to work with the ITF to raise the issue of labour rights violations against strike participants at the ILO and OECD, in cooperation with the ITUC, and seek advice on 'other forms of solidarity that may be needed'. Thanking the international labour movement for its outpouring of support and solidarity, the statement concluded: 'With continued cooperation we will be able

to stop labor repression and privatization in Korea and build a global movement for quality public transport and labor rights.'[126]

The ITF issued a press release on 3 January 2014 to mark the end of the strike: 'The mass mobilisation of trade unionists and the moral and practical support given by ordinary women and men in Korea shows the privatisation of the railways and other public services will not be taken lying down.' It condemned attacks on railworkers and their unions and promised:

> The international labour movement will continue to monitor the situation closely, in particular the continued repression of trade unionists. We urge the government to stop these utterly unacceptable attacks and are on standby to support our Korean brothers and sisters.[127]

Working with the ITF to stress the importance of maintaining vigilance over the issue was the regional labour movement organization, SIGTUR.[128]

Continuing national and international action occurred in response to government reprisals, such as Korail's dismissal of 490 workers and other punishments against the thousands who took part in the strike, arrest warrants against KRWU leaders and a lawsuit against the KRWU, which rendered most of its leaders liable to arrest due to civil and criminal claims for damages in excess of 7.7 billion won.[129] The KCTU called for nationwide simultaneous protests in Korea on 4 January and a second and third general strike on 9 January and 16 January, the latter in conjunction with a People's Day of Action. These events took place under the slogan: 'Step Down, Park! Stop Privatisation! Abolish Union Repression!'[130] The union asked members of the international labour movement to organize protests at Korean legations in timing with these dates to demand the withdrawal of criminal charges, the damage suit, dismissals and disciplinary measures against the KRWU, 'an end to labour repression in Korea, and an end to the unilateral pursuit of privatization'.[131]

As requested, there were solidarity actions and demonstrations at Korean diplomatic offices around the world to coincide with the KCTU's protests and strikes. The Unison protest in the UK on 8 January featured British unionists holding up placards in Korean saying 'I am not fine!' And there were further actions throughout January 2014. The ITF slammed Korea's 'joke justice' when 13 KRWU leaders, charged with having led what was a legitimate and lawful industrial action, made a dignified surrender to police on 14 January. Swiss rail union SEV protested at the Korean embassy in Berne on 17 January to coincide with a visit by President Park. Another international union delegation, of representatives from the ITUC, PSI and ITF, visited South Korea to investigate the current situation of trade union and human rights. It visited the KRWU's leaders in prison and condemned the government's victimization of the union leadership. It held a press conference in Seoul outlining the international labour movement's position on the fundamental labour rights of railway and other workers in Korea.[132]

Despite Fukuyama's gloating at the 'end of history' in the triumph of free-market capitalism over contending systems,[133] the economic systems of the

Western world endured and enjoyed acceptance prior to the neoliberal turn precisely because they were not wholly free-market oriented. Governments were committed to restraining the 'invisible hand' of the market and protecting people from its worst effects. The genuine reforms once pursued by labour and social-democratic parties in many countries, and by Democrats in the USA during the New Deal period, provided capitalism with vital economic and social infrastructure that gave it stability. Zygmunt Bauman argues that social systems such as the welfare state, which focused on the ends which capitalism neglected, 'enforced corrections which prevented the accumulation of potentially lethal dysfunctions'.[134]

Social democracy provided capitalism with requisite restraint and practical solutions to age-old capitalist contradictions – such as how to keep workers alive, well and functioning. With the dismantling of much of social democracy's legacy, neoliberalism has reshaped capitalist societies to such an extent that considerably fewer systems exist to alleviate the harmful effects on the majority of the increasing prosperity of the minority. John McMurtry has referred to the neoliberal globalization era as 'the cancer stage of capitalism'. Capital's uncontrolled expansion is attacking the social institutions that maintain public life in a way similar to encroachments of tumorous cells on a human body: 'the underlying logic of market competition systematically selects against life protection itself … its pathology is virulent and progressive as an invasive disease is'. The malignancy diverts more and more social resources to fuel its own growth. The host body's immune system does not prevent the cancer's advance; its communication systems are subordinate to transnational capital so cannot identify the source of the disease.[135]

Labour and social-democratic parties in the past few decades have to varying degrees failed to prevent or significantly slow down the marketization of societies around the world. They became alternative parties of capital rather than parties of labour. This 'de-social-democratization' suggests global capitalism has transformed social democracy more than the latter has transformed capitalism.[136] These parties are suffering the electoral consequences of their abandonment of their historical project to tame the market, a process of decline speeded up by complicity with imposed austerity after 2008, as in the spectacular case of the displacement of Greece's Pasok party by upstart left party Syriza.

In the absence of adequate defence of the public realm from traditional left parliamentary parties, unions have led and joined in movements to protect public wealth and public services. Whether successful or unsuccessful, union action to protect the commons indicates a new pattern of alignment that places workers and most people in any community on the same side of an increasingly sharp divide. Policies associated with globalization that promote the private at the expense of the public have provoked people adversely affected to coalesce in opposition. Unions are frequently seizing the initiative in expressing the discontents of marketization, building alliances and mobilizing broad community coalitions, indicating labour's capacity to develop fresh strategies in the face of globalization.

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9 Raging against the rich

> Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, *i.e.*, on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.
>
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In addition to regular processes of marketization discussed in the previous chapter, globalizing capitalism has often imposed regimes of austerity upon particular countries as punishment for indebtedness and extreme deficit financing or to meet requirements such as neoliberal criteria for entering the Eurozone. International finance capital is here the main player, acting through the IMF and other supranational bodies such as the European Central Bank. In the post-GFC era, 'austerity' has become a commonplace term, but enforced austerity goes back to the dawn of globalization, commencing with the 'structural adjustment programs' (SAPs) imposed on debt-laden developing countries from the late 1970s onwards. Public-sector funding cuts to reduce government expenditure, and privatizations, are the principal means by which the objectives of austerity are achieved. However, austerity is not a project for downsizing the state but a response to capitalist crisis that demands more state intervention rather than less.[1]

Academic economists warn that imposed austerity makes matters worse rather than better, impeding economic recovery. Conventional economic wisdom teaches that it is not in the interests of employers to drive wages down to desperation levels, since most consumers are wage-earners, so low wages reduce consumer demand. This reasoning assumes that capitalism is organized such that each nation's labour market is the sole source of demand for its economy's output. However, the typical large corporation's labour pool and customer base are now globally dispersed. Revenue maximization is sought offshore; cost reduction created everywhere.[2]

Structural adjustment riots and other outbursts

Late last century developing countries were often obliged to pursue SAPs in exchange for debt relief and loans from transnational agencies, such as the

World Bank and IMF, which took over debts owed to private banks. In return for financial assistance, governments were required to adopt neoliberal policies, which adversely affected most people in these countries. Minimum wages were frozen at their existing levels or reduced, if not abolished in the course of labour market deregulation, which undermined wage-rates generally and made workplaces less safe and working conditions worse. Labour organization was repressed via harsher industrial relations policies. Enforced free-trade policies reduced or abolished tariffs to protect developing industries, causing lack of development and rising unemployment. Abolition of government price controls or subsidies on food resulted in higher food prices and increased poverty. Cuts in public expenditure reduced spending on health, education, welfare, public-sector wages and salaries. Privatization of publicly owned utilities led to retrenchments, price rises and poorer services. Redirection of agricultural land to develop crops for export caused deforestation and increased rural poverty. Deregulation of the financial sector of the economy made it harder for poor people to obtain credit at reasonable interest rates and other financial services. SAPs directly dismantled many of the accomplishments of post-colonial regimes.[3] Piketty comments that today's wealthiest countries developed public sectors and tax systems suitable to fostering national development, and were able to reduce their tariffs gradually when appropriate. 'They were fortunate enough not to have anyone tell them what they ought to be doing instead.' By contrast the 'ultraliberal wave' after 1980 forced poor countries to adopt austerity policies detrimental to their development.[4]

Workers and working-class organizations frequently led resistance to austerity programmes inflicted on developing countries. In the huge protests against SAPs that enveloped the developing world from the late-1970s, when the first SAPs were introduced, to the 1990s, labour movements were at the forefront. These industrial and civil disturbances included general strikes, massive street protests and confiscations of food and other basic needs. Such insurrections led to the coining of terms such as 'structural adjustment riots', 'anti-IMF riots' or 'food riots'.[5] The practice – and its namings – was indicative of the degree of discontent in the developing world, spearheaded largely by organized workers.

New terminology was not confined to English. In 1993 there was a riot in Argentina, which combined wages claims and protest against structural adjustment, when thousands of public employees sacked and burned three government buildings and the private residences of nearly a dozen politicians and officials in Santiago del Estero. The continuing frequency of such incidents in Argentina established the term 'estallido' (explosion or outburst) for the new and unconventional forms of protest.[6] Equally unconventional but less aggressive was a flamboyant demonstration in India in August 1992. Cotton-mill workers from central Bombay marched through the streets in underpants and undershirts, denouncing as a sham India's commitment to eradicate poverty through structural adjustment.[7] By 2001 the World Development Movement stated there had been industrial strikes and direct action protests around the world, involving millions of people opposing the policies promoted by the IMF, World Bank and

WTO. Its 2002 report, *States of Unrest*, observed: 'the fiercest critics of IMF and World Bank policies were the people most affected by them'. It documented protests in 23 countries, 76 reported fatalities, and arrests and injuries running into thousands.[8]

There were often huge ramifications for labour organizations themselves as they struggled with the pressures caused by imposed austerity. For example, Venezuela had one of the highest unionization rates in South America in the 1980s, but its mainstream labour movement was unable to fight successfully against SAPs, because the Workers' Confederation of Venezuela (CTV) had become conservative and corrupt during the immediate post-war decades. Real household income declined more than 40 per cent between 1981 and 1989; for the poorest strata this decline was 54 per cent, worsening an already inegalitarian income distribution. In the absence of mainstream labour movement resistance, new forms of union organization emerged. From 1985 onwards, strike activities and social disruption increased and the CTV lost control of the process. Unions were formulating demands and striking against both private and state employers, with or without CTV permission. Labour organizations emerged that were politically independent and free from corruption, and strongly opposed to the new economic and social conditions.[9]

In Zambia the mainstream union movement was able and willing to lead resistance. The IMF's 1983–1987 SAP imposed wage freezes in conditions of high inflation, with sharp cuts in food and fertilizer subsidies and government spending. When the Kaunda Government signed this agreement with the IMF in 1983, the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions accepted the challenge and moved to the political forefront in the struggle against increasing economic inequality and reduced living standards for most people as prices rose dramatically with the withdrawal of food subsidies. One of its strengths lay in its democratic organizational structure. When the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) was launched in 1990, unions became a major force within it. The Congress spearheaded the movement for democracy, aided by its history of struggle for democracy and mobilization of other organizations and movements.[10]

In 1991 the Congress began a campaign of strikes, not only about pay but also about governance. With strong public support despite the extensive disruption, the government backed down in September and awarded all public servants a 100 per cent salary increase backdated to 1 August 1991. The growing popular resistance to austerity culminated in the 25 October 1991 landslide election victory of the MMD led by former Congress chairman Frederick Chiluba, who became the second president of Zambia.[11] Paschal Mihyo concludes that the Congress succeeded in leading various social groups against the Kaunda government because of its long history of independence and its refusal to be incorporated into government and party structures, its 'championing of democracy, equality, equity and accountability'.[12] The final success of MMD was due primarily to widespread industrial action by various unions and the Congress's coordination and capacity to form alliances with other movements. However,

once in office, Chiluba reversed his position to drive through a ferocious programme of IMF-backed privatizations – mining, land, transport, energy – and reduce labour rights. Tax revenue from copper-mining, 59 per cent of government income in the 1960s, brought in only 5 per cent due to investor-friendly agreements with foreign companies when privatized.[13]

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) was formed in 1981 but suffered from lack of democratic structures, corruption and maladministration until the 1988 election of Morgan Tsvangirai as secretary-general. Tsvangirai reinstated sound administrative principles, established principles of democracy and accountability, initiated regional structures through which the organization would be more easily accessible to rank-and-file workers, and built alliances with other organizations such as cooperatives, human rights groups and students. Union density increased from 20 per cent in 1984 to 24 per cent by 1992, with growth in public-sector associations especially strong. By 1989 the ZCTU's new oppositional disposition was apparent. It criticized wage freezes and price increases, as well as the government's new policy to attract foreign investment and liberalize labour laws, in particular on dismissals. It challenged the extension of emergency powers that outlawed strikes in a wide range of essential services and opposed the transformation of Zimbabwe into a one-party state, arguing that the economic policies of the government called for a strong, united and democratic labour movement.[14]

The government did not even consult the ZCTU prior to the introduction of a SAP in 1991. Massive retrenchments swept the formal sector and inflation accelerated in the wake of currency devaluations. Prices of everything except the staples of maize-meal and fresh milk were decontrolled. Hard-hitting cost-recovery measures included introduction of school fees in urban areas and means-tested fees for health care. With the unions adopting an increasingly independent stance, multiple strikes in various sectors occurred in 1992 and 1994 in which workers demanded higher wages and better conditions. Some were wildcat strikes; others received full union backing. The union movement became the vanguard of resistance not only to the effects of neoliberal globalization and the SAP in particular but also to the political dictatorship developing. It catered now to a broader base: not only waged workers in the formal sector but also retrenched workers, the unemployed, those working in the informal sector, workers on the communal lands which had become a dumping ground for those who could no longer afford to live in urban areas, and semi-professional employees such as nurses and teachers – in defiance of the government's continuing attempts to divide and rule the labour movement along lines of skill and race. The ZCTU widened its traditional constituency even further by forming alliances with other groups, notably students, human rights organizations and the cooperative movement. At the same time, the unions strengthened their bases on the shop-floor by extending their organization to regional and district levels. According to Freek Schiphorst, the ZCTU embarked on a serious attempt to represent the interests of both workers and the wider Zimbabwean community.[15]

The grand refusals of European labour: before the GFC

Developed countries by the 1990s were also undergoing 'structural adjustment' in the interests of corporations, equivalent to processes experienced in developing countries: cutting social expenditure, privatizations, deregulation of labour markets to undermine wage-rates and undo earlier labour movement achievements. Western media rarely reported that workers and labour movements in developing countries were responding to SAPs with riots, demonstrations and strikes, but equivalent European protests could hardly be ignored. They rocked entire societies: Europe was a hotbed of anti-austerity mobilizations in the mid-to-late 1990s. These were largely a response to neoliberal adjustment programmes associated with 'convergence criteria' for entry to the European Monetary Union (EMU). Typically, these austerity programmes demanded 'restraint' over wages and salaries, privatizations, public-sector funding cuts and reductions in social security entitlements and coverage.[16]

In late 1995 France was paralyzed by workers striking against cuts to the minimum wage, a public-sector pay freeze, cuts to education spending and plans to alter social security that would have jeopardized welfare and health services. Commencing with a wave of one-day public-sector strikes involving up to five million workers, indefinite strikes continued, concentrated in the transport, communication and energy sectors. Strikes were accompanied by massive street demonstrations that by December involved over two million protesters.[17] *Le Monde*, Eurocentrically, deemed this outburst 'the first revolt against globalization'.[18] The strike wave was an example of determined community-wide resistance to austerity policies, with unions playing a major role in mobilizing opposition.

In France, as in other countries of the EU, discontent amongst working-class people had been festering for some time. Pierre Bourdieu's *The Weight of the World* depicts the suffering of people and communities in France in the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of processes associated with globalization: 'these mechanisms that make life painful, even unlivable'.[19] A study of 3,500 demonstrations in Marseille and Nantes in the 1980s and some 1,000 in Paris in 1991 challenged the claims of new social movement theory. Participants were disproportionately workers with employment and income concerns. Working-class organizations largely predominated. In 80–90 per cent of cases the demands were materialist ones. Compared to the 1970s, this period witnessed a decline in demonstrations with post-materialist claims.[20]

Despite the chaos and inconveniences, citizens throughout France supported the December 1995 action, indicative of the breadth of opposition to austerity measures. A British journalist could not find a single traffic-jam-bound commuter opposed to the strike.[21] According to Alain Touraine, this 'grand refus' was a powerful manifestation of opposition in the classic French ritual of unions leading workers and students in the streets on behalf of the nation.[22] Bourdieu argued the movement received overwhelming support, because it was regarded as a necessary defence of social advances of the whole society, concerning work, public education, public transport – indeed, everything which is public: 'In a

rough and confused form it outlined a genuine project for a society, collectively affirmed and capable of being put forward against what is being imposed by the dominant politics.'[23] Castells stressed the significance of this resort to France's older traditions of syndicalism:

> These, and other movements spreading throughout the world, are ending the neo-liberal fantasy of creating a new global economy independent of society by using computer architecture. The grand exclusionary scheme of concentrating information, production, and markets in a valuable segment of population and disposing of the rest in different forms is triggering, in Touraine's expression, a '*grand refus*.'[24]

The grand refus was simply the most spectacular amongst the huge waves of strikes and demonstrations across EU countries in the 1990s. As in France, union-led campaigns against austerity erupted. In a country where strikes are rare, German metalworkers' union IG Metall successfully mobilized a national strike in 1996 in defence of sick-pay agreements that were jeopardized by projected changes to the social security system; this involved 350,000 workers and was the largest demonstration since the war. In Italy, likewise, the widespread public-sector strikes against pay restraint, pension 'reform' and privatization were the largest since the war, involving 1.5 million workers. In 1996, there was a day of action in Spain involving over 650,000 people. There were one-day general strikes in Greece; and Danish workers organized strike actions that involved almost all sectors. There were similar movements in other countries, such as Belgium. This wave of mobilization was an obstacle to further restructuring along the lines initially dictated by architects of EMU.[25]

In the wake of the GFC

Piketty considers it 'hard to avoid' the question whether increase in inequality triggered the GFC, given that the upper decile's share in national income peaked twice in the past century, in 1928 and 2007. He argues:

> there is absolutely no doubt that the increase of inequality in the United States contributed to the nation's financial instability … virtual stagnation of the purchasing power of the lower and middle classes … made it more likely that modest households would take on debt, especially since unscrupulous banks and financial intermediaries, freed from regulation and eager to earn good yields on the enormous savings injected into the system by the well-to-do, offered credit on increasingly generous terms.[26]

The IMF has acknowledged that austerity measures reduce consumer demand, impeding economic recovery and harming growth prospects. Nonetheless, in the wake of the GFC, the 'solution' has been an overdose of policies that caused the problem, as Oxfam notes:

> Under huge pressure from financial markets, austerity programs have been implemented across Europe in the face of large-scale public protests. Based on regressive taxes and deep spending cuts – particularly to public services such as education, healthcare and social security.… They have also sought to erode labor rights. The poorest sections of society have been hit hardest, as the burden of responsibility for the excesses of past decades is passed to those who are most vulnerable and least to blame.[27]

After 2008 it seemed that globalizing capitalism was endangering not only the well-being of the vast majority of people around the world but also its own continuation. Systemic instability was threatened by the possibility of financial collapse and widespread political rejection. Even in prosperous Germany, cuts in public spending had severe consequences, as Ver.Di's 'Städte in Not' (Cities in Need) campaign of its 'Justice Done Differently' project emphasized: 'Streets rot, youth centres and municipal offices close – in many cities there is financial emergency. Instead of counteracting this, the federal government coalition drives communities further into poverty.'[28] In poorer, southern European countries the situation was made worse by common currency. Before joining the euro, they could have devalued their currency to restore competitiveness and stimulate economic activity. Instead, speculation on national interest rates has been more destabilizing than exchange rate speculation previously. The capital flows triggered were large enough to seriously affect Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Italy.[29]

In the wake of the GFC there were significant mobilizations around the world against the use of taxpayer funds to bail out financial institutions, and, on the other hand, factory closures, job losses, wage-cuts, pension-cuts, foreclosures and price hikes for poorer citizens. 'It's Capitalism, Stupid' waved the banners. Many of these mobilizations included repeated strikes on the part of workers or occupations in response to factory closures, such as at Republic Windows and Doors in the USA, Waterford Crystal in Ireland and the Fralib tea factory in France.[30] As the crisis continued, the recuperation of factories became a significant movement, discussed in Chapter 7 as a creative alternative to unemployment. The rest of this section provides glimpses of working-class organization in anti-austerity mobilizations in Greece, where divisions within the labour movement signified important developments.

Anti-austerity mobilization in Greece 2008–2011

In December 2008 as the 'aganaktismenoi' (outraged) mobilized against the government's harsh austerity measures, first on the streets along with students were workers and 'base unions'. Base unions in Greece are those that develop from grassroots level in workplaces as less bureaucratic and more militant alternatives to mainstream unions. Two major umbrella trade union bodies had halted a planned general strike and labour rally: the main private-sector workers' union, the General Confederation of Greek Workers (GSEE); and the

major public-sector umbrella union, the Civil Servants' Confederation (ADEDY). Following the murder by police of 15-year-old Alexandros Grigoropoulos on 10 December, several workers' associations and some union federations – such as OLME (the Federation of Secondary School Teachers of Greece) and POSDEP (Hellenic Federation of University Teachers' Associations) – refused to comply with the order not to strike.[31] They insisted on calling a 'Pan-worker rally' in front of parliament, a mass demonstration of thousands of workers who, according to the organizers, 'broke the climate of terror and gave a direct response to selling out of the trade-union leadership'.[32]

After this rally, these more independent unions gathered at the Law School in Athens and held a meeting open to workers from unions in primary and secondary education, medical and health care, technical employment, the publishing industry, the media, engineering, building and other occupations. The meeting issued a 'Statement of the Open Assembly of Workers from Public and Private Sector Associations', which demanded 'Not a cent to the banks' and the reversal of the 'anti-people policies of austerity, redundancies, privatization and authoritarianism'. It expressed rage at the cold-blooded murder of Grigoropoulos and 'the global policy of assassinating, every day, the needs and dreams of workers and the youth which necessitates austerity measures, mass layoffs, privatization and casualized employment'. The rift amongst workers' organizations was manifest:

> We condemn the despicable decision of the GSEE and ADEDY to call off the labour rally organized for the day of the general strike. This extreme form of complete compliance with the government's desires reflects the union bureaucracy's deeper conformity to government policy.… We fight for a far-reaching, pan-worker, popular uprising to overthrow the policies of austerity, the redundancies, the bloodshed.… We appeal to each and every union worker who wants to move in a class direction and call on them to defend their right to protest, strike, to occupations.… Together, we call on the base associations to take the destiny of the struggle into their hands through general assemblies. The goal is that there may exist a decisive mass struggle with occupations, strikes and demonstrations.[33]

The intensity of the struggle – and the serious schism amongst unions – was expressed clearly in the occupation of GSEE headquarters by workers angered by GSEE's role in cancelling the strikers' demonstration the previous week and encouraging people to disperse from Syntagma Square, 'fearing that they might get infected by the virus of insurrection'. The workers declared the building a 'Liberated Workers' Zone' and issued a declaration under the bolded heading **'We will either determine our history ourselves or let it be determined without us.'** It stated:

> We; manual workers, employees, jobless, temporary workers, local and migrant workers, are not passive TV-viewers … we have participated in the

demonstrations, the clashes with the police, the occupations of the city centre and of the neighborhoods. Time and again we had to leave work and our daily obligations to take to the streets in solidarity with the high school students, the university students and the other proletarians in struggle.

The decision to occupy GSEE headquarters was:

To turn it into a space of free expression and a meeting point for workers.

To counteract the media-touted myth that the workers were and are absent from the clashes, and that the rage of these past days was an affair of some 500 'hoody wearers' [koukoulofori],[34] 'hooligans' or some other fairy tale, while on TV the workers are presented as victims of the clashes, at the same time as the capitalist crisis in Greece and worldwide leads to countless layoffs that the media and their bosses present as a 'natural phenomenon'.

To condemn and uncover the role of the trade union bureaucracy in the undermining of the revolt – and not only there. GSEE and the entire trade union mechanism that supports it, has for decades and decades undermined the struggles of workers, bargaining away our labour power for crumbs, perpetuating a system of exploitation and wage slavery…

To open up this space for the first time – as a continuation of the social opening created by the revolt itself – a space that has been built by our own contributions, yet a space from which we were excluded. For years we have entrusted our fate to saviours of every kind, and as a result we have lost our dignity. As workers we have to start assuming our responsibilities, and to stop assigning our hopes to wise leaders or 'able' representatives. We have to acquire a voice of our own, to meet up, to talk, to decide, and to act. Against the generalized attack we endure. The creation of collective 'grassroots' resistances is the only way.

To propagate the idea of self-organization and solidarity in working places, struggle committees and collective grassroot procedures, abolishing the trade union bureaucrats.

All these years we have swallowed the misery, the humiliation, the violence of work. We have become accustomed to counting our crippled and our dead – so-called 'labour accidents'. We have become accustomed to ignoring the migrant workers – our class comrades – getting killed. We are tired of living with the anxiety of securing a wage, revenue stamps, and a pension that now feels like nothing but a distant dream.

As we struggle not to abandon our lives in the hands of the bosses and the trade union officials, likewise we will not abandon any arrested insurgent in the hands of the state and the judicial system.

IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF THOSE DETAINED
NO CHARGES FOR THOSE ARRESTED
SELF-ORGANIZATION OF THE WORKERS
GENERAL STRIKE.[35]

On 9 January 2009 thousands of protesters again filled the streets of Greece, proving, in the words of radical media-industry workers, that 'the fire of December won't be put out, not by bullets and acid against activists, nor by the ideological terrorism spread by the media'. On Saturday 10 January a group of employed workers, unemployed and recently fired workers and students in the media industry occupied the headquarters of the Union of Journalists, Photographers and other Media Industry Workers (ESIEA) to denounce mainstream media lies about the struggle and counteract the inaction of mainstream unions.[36] This occupation had ideological, material and industrial aims:

> This endeavour, which basically opposes dominant Discourse, aims at exposing the medieval working conditions in the mass media, as well as promoting the need for the creation of a unified assembly for the expression of ALL those who work in the media industry.[37]

The first statement issued by the occupation on 11 January referred to the fragmenting effects of 'the dominant Spectacle', 'the systematic suppressive and ideological propaganda promoted by the bosses', portrayed by ESIEA and high profile journalists, 'who use disinformation, distortion and concealment'. Against this the occupiers stated: 'our solidarity is not expressed through television screens, but on the streets, in our occupation of public buildings, in our conflicts alongside the oppressed, those who resist, in whom we can see our own struggles'. This first occupation statement described the exploitation and ESIEA's inadequacy:

> Insecure/flexible labour relations, unpaid/uninsured employment, part-time jobs, exhausting shifts, employers' arbitrariness, and mass lay-offs shape the media industry, within the context of a wider transformation of the system, at the centre of which lies the neo-liberal restructuring of labour.
>
> On its behalf, ESIEA not only doesn't oppose the interests of the employers, but also gives its consent and remains silent before their abuse of power.
>
> While functioning as an elite guild that excludes thousands of workers in the media industry, it also strongly opposes the pressing demands to overcome internal divisions and sectoral fragmentation in order to create a single media union.

It concluded: 'We do not fear layoffs, the bosses should fear WILD STRIKES.'[38]

The second statement on 13 January insisted 'The workers will have the last word – not the media bosses' and emphasized the 'everyday exploitation' they experienced. The rebellion of the previous month 'has put forward an issue of dignity for everyone whose survival depends on wage labour'. As a result, these 'media workers' declared they stood with the rebels.

> We do it actively: we participate in their fight as workers, and we join their fight with our own everyday battle in our places of work. Our main goal is

> to prevent the bosses from imposing their views about the events.… We don't fool ourselves about what the media, a crucial ideological apparatus of the State, will do to force the people to leave the streets and go home; they'll do everything and we know it all too well, because, of course, we work in the media.

It described how 'Lately, under the threat of a coming economic crisis, we also suffer intensification of layoffs, and the fear of them.' To explain the motive behind occupation, the statement concluded: 'Like all workers, we experience the hypocrisy and the betrayal of the syndicates.' ESIEA was 'an institution that turns against the workers' calls for resistance against the bosses', 'a bosses' union and a basic support mechanism for them', proven by its refusal to take part in the general strike on 10 December 2008.[39] Tensions within ESIEA ranks persisted over the next few years.[40]

The ESIEA building occupation continued into the following week, amidst a wave of occupations of workplaces in the first few months of 2009. For example, 27 unions occupied the office of the Evangelismos Hospital in Athens, in solidarity with Konstantina Kouneva, immigrant worker and general secretary of the Panattic Union of Cleaners and Domestic Personnel, being treated there for serious injuries following a sulphuric-acid attack by employer-hired thugs on 23 December 2008. Also in solidarity with Kouneva, workers occupied the Athens-Piraeus Railway and Aristotle University in Thessaloniki; and 120 employees of the water-supply company in Thessaloniki went on strike and stayed in the building to press demands against privatization, internal corruption and understaffing.[41] Working-class anger and frustration did not abate; and was not articulated by mainstream unions. In March 2010, GSEE leader Yannis Panagopoulos was beaten by demonstrators, during a general strike and another wave of workers' occupations, including the headquarters of the Government Gazette. Interior ministry employees working there hoped to stop the law introducing austerity measures from being printed, though the government insisted it would become law regardless.[42]

Resistance to dismissals was a common focus of industrial actions. For instance, in March 2010, Carmen M, member of the Waiters' and Cooks' Base Trade Union, was fired by the boss of coffee-shop chain VIA VAI after returning from legal leave. After the union intervened on her behalf, on 24 March Carmen was brutally assaulted on the head on her way home and abandoned bleeding and unconscious. On 26 March union members, together with dozens of supporters, blockaded the coffee shop for many hours while the boss hid in the basement. After similar interventions at two other VIA VAI cafes, the boss contacted the union to offer to pay Carmen outstanding money owed her, insisting it was a 'misunderstanding'. The union made a public statement: 'There are obviously no misunderstandings and no isolated incidents. Unpaid overtime, "forgotten" medical insurance contributions, the non-payment of supplements, sackings, wage decreases and informal labour are all part of the reality we experience daily in the labour galleys.' Whoever dares to speak of such things,

the union continued, is faced with either the terrorism of the bosses that includes guns, threats, thugs and sulphuric-acid, or the terrorism of unemployment, at a time when the state under pretext of financial crisis redefines the terms of paid employment in favour of the bosses, intensifying exploitation and repression. In this process, 'the state and bosses have found willing allies in the leaders of the sold-out trade unions, in exchange for future government and party positions'. Unions have accordingly signed collective agreements that include the freezing or decrease of wages; they ignore the assassinations and butchering of dozens of workers; they refuse to call for general strikes and when they do sometimes call for strikes under workers' pressure, they sabotage them.

> From our own labour experiences we believe that EACH OF US and ALL OF US TOGETHER must take responsibility for: The formation of Base Unions in all labour sections where they do not currently exist; The support for existing Base Unions; The strengthening of the General Assemblies of workers.… **RESISTANCE to the terrorism of the bosses. SOLIDARITY between workers. SELF-ORGANIZE in all workplaces**.[43]

For workers at the Sanitary Garbage Landfill in the Ano Liosia district of Athens, resistance, solidarity and self-organization took the form of closing the facility indefinitely in March 2010 and vowing in a public statement: 'No employee will work on Wednesday 11th of March in any municipalities and prefectures around Greece. We, all types of workers in the pubic sector, will protest in front of the Labour Ministry in Athens.' The statement concluded: 'P.S. It would be clever for the cops not to attack us like they did last time because this time we will smash them with our garbage trucks.'[44]

Bankruptcies were common. When courier company Interattica in Athens announced closure in April 2010 and all 205 employees would be sacked without compensation, the workers immediately blocked all exits to the company's building, trapping management inside. Communication was quickly established with the company's headquarters in Paris. Miraculously, within a few hours, the bankrupt company found the funds to compensate the workers, providing a written guarantee all workers would be paid within the next month. A workers' committee remained in the building, guarding company valuables, until all compensation payments were made.[45]

An alternative approach was taken by employees of the restaurant Barthelonika in the centre of Thessaloniki, who started running it under workers' control from 7 June when the owner decided to close. 'As workers in the food industry, we know well that a firing in today's environment of deep economic crisis and tough anti-worker attacks would mean our being thrown out into the cold.' They reduced prices of all dishes by 30 per cent and invited community support for the self-organized project, which they announced was working normally but without bosses, managers and hierarchical relationships. Everyone worked at their previous levels, decisions were made by majority votes in democratic assemblies and all proceeds after expenses were distributed equally among all

co-workers: 'We all decide together about everything, we find suppliers and look after the place. In this climate of crisis, if we accept the decisions of the bosses without reaction we will be led straight to abjection.'[46]

In the meantime, GSEE leaders abandoned the May Day demonstration on 1 May 2010 under constant booing by demonstrators. Town halls in Athens suburbs were occupied by unions of municipal employees. The parliament building was blockaded on 4 May during a 48-hour general strike called by ADEDY, supported by hygiene workers, teachers and other grassroots unions, which also staged demonstrations across the country on 8 May.[47]

The bias of the media remained a major issue for workers. On 3 May 2010 dozens of teachers entered the headquarters of the state-owned National Radio and Television in Athens while the 9 pm news was live on air, demanding to be present during a scheduled interview after the news with the education minister. Despite being beaten by police special forces, the protesters negotiated to get a short recorded message on air. As members of the national union of teachers, they spoke out against the IMF and urged people to support the general strike on 5 May. They criticized the proposed new education law that would decrease the quality of public education 'by packing more than 30 students in each classroom' and make 17,000 teachers unemployed. Arguing the mass media was complicit in the government's austerity measures, they explained their action was designed 'to break, in praxis, the monologue of the Education Ministry … which will destroy public and un-commercial education … against the needs and rights of the society in Greece. Against the workers, the parents, the students, the teachers.'[48]

Under pressure from below, GSEE and ADEDY announced a general strike for 29 June 2010, but base unions were dismayed this came six days after passage of a law that doubled the number of employees a company could fire each month and more than halved compensation payments. Outraged members of PAME, the All-Workers Militant Front allied to the Communist Party, and base unionists including building workers, blocked all entrances to the port of Piraeus on 23 June, in solidarity with the dockworkers' union, whose strike had been declared illegal. Syndicalist workers employed by the Public Power Corporation occupied its headquarters on 28 June, covered the building in banners and organized discussions inside on the financial crisis. They remained in occupation until the following day, that of the general strike, when they demonstrated outside the finance ministry. On 30 June 2010 National Radio and Television workers occupied their building in Athens in response to an announcement that all programmes were cancelled and 1,047 workers would be unemployed from 1 July.[49]

On 8 July 2010 public and private-sector workers went on strike. Hospitals only functioned for emergencies. The buses, trains and trams of Athens were halted and timetables elsewhere modified. Ferries were at a standstill and all flights cancelled. Even parliamentary workers were out, making it difficult for deputies to vote for the unpopular new law to dismantle the social security system. News about the shutdowns was limited as media industry workers were also on strike. On 29 July the government ordered the 'civil conscription' of

lorry drivers, after they went on strike for a fourth consecutive day; in September 3,000 lorry drivers blocked off six of the main avenues in Athens, including one in front of parliament, and a group of drivers attempted to storm parliament and were tear-gassed by police.[50]

In the early hours of 11 September 2010, dozens of people attacked and burned down the Inland Revenue Office in Athens, while, that day, members of base unions from all over the country disrupted the announcement of Prime Minister Papandreou at the international trade fair in Thessaloniki that business taxes would be reduced from 24 to 20 per cent and there would be privatization of the National Railways, the State Electricity Company and other public corporations. All-Workers Militant Front members flew a large banner from Lefkos Pyrgos (White Tower): 'Everybody to the streets. The people shall not pay for the consequences of the crisis.'[51] Back in Athens, with national wage levels down 25 per cent and unemployment doubling during the previous year, and 150 layoffs announced by the country's largest media group, the Union of Employees in the Book Sector and the Union of Translators, Proofreaders and Editors called for a sector-wide strike 29 September. This was joined by transport, hospital, dockworkers and others. GSEE and ADEDY had ignored the ETUC's call for a European Day of Action against austerity measures that day, so many Greek unionists 'started taking matters into their own hands', as the bookworkers' union explained.[52] Without the support of official trade unions, a solidarity demonstration at the Acropolis on 13 October for the sacked publishing industry workers attracted 3,000 people from base unions and left-wing groups. It stated: 'we can do this alone, we need no sold-out unions'.[53]

The iconic Acropolis site was also chosen by contract employees of the ministry for culture as their venue for protest against the fact they had been unpaid for 22 months and about to be made unemployed at the end of October 2010. They occupied the monument to demand two years' back pay and permanent employment. Riot police stormed the site on 14 October, chased and beat the workers inside, and tear-gassed them as well as passers-by. A month later, again without mainstream union support, base unions and leftist groups organized a large anti-IMF demonstration in central Athens on 16 November. At the end of that month, the government enforced civil conscription of the Piraeus dockworkers, on strike again. December 2010 saw huge waves of public transport strikes, mainly half-day strikes called 'work halts'. Inside stations and bus terminals, workers handed out leaflets, pasted posters, put up stickers and graffiti, spoke to passengers, sabotaged the ticket machines and stencilled the sides of buses with slogans such as 'FREE TRANSPORT FOR EVERYBODY', 'SOLIDARITY WITH THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT WORKERS' and 'SNITCHES-TICKET INSPECTORS'. During a general strike on 15 December, Athens bus workers occupied four of seven depots of the largest bus company ETHEL, shutting down most bus routes. The mass participation in the general strike emboldened the base unions to call another demonstration on 17 December in defiance of the unwillingness of GSEE and ADEDY to call a general strike. The journalists' union called for a 48-hour strike 17–18 December.[54]

Public transport strikes in Athens continued for months during the winter then spring of 2011, despite court orders deeming such action illegal, which rendered participants liable to heavy penalties, including dismissal. The strikes opposed staffing cuts, price increases and the proposed privatization of the network. Exceptions to the mass withdrawal of labour from the network occurred on 23 March to transfer striking teachers to a demonstration. This was triggered by the 14 March announcement by the education ministry that 1,933 of the 16,000 schools across the country would merge down to 877, threatening jobs of around 4,000 teachers. In addition to teachers' strikes and demonstrations, students occupied schools and black flags were flown outside the schools to be amalgamated.[55]

The Occupy moment and the labour movement

The cries of the aganaktismenoi in Greece were echoed in other countries reeling from imposed austerity. Also, as in Greece, there was frequently disconnection between mainstream labour organizations and radical union movements, which threw their energies behind anti-austerity mobilizations that articulated demands important to workers, such as increased public-sector funding, improved welfare systems, higher wages, less casualization and higher taxes on the rich. They confronted, in the words of the Spanish 'indignados' (outraged), 'the deception that to deal with the debt crisis that grips Europe, increasing the competitiveness of national economies can only be achieved by reducing labour costs … ONCE AGAIN'.[56]

The indignant mood was expressed forcibly by the Occupy movement that emerged during 2011, vowing to 'remove the influence money has over policy'. The Occupy theme was: 'We are the 99 per cent.' This slogan focused attention on the grotesque proportions – to slightly varying degrees from country to country – of wealth and income enjoyed by the richest 1 per cent of populations. Social movements rarely have a single point of origin, but Occupy arguably began to develop in January 2011 with the uprising in Tunisia, then the Tahrir Square occupation and widespread workers' strikes in Egypt, which were crucial components of the Arab Spring, and then the 'acampadas' resistance model that proliferated in Spain during May 2011.[57] When Occupy erupted spectacularly in Wall Street on 17 September 2011, it acknowledged earlier episodes of resistance:

> OCCUPYWALLSTREET is a leaderless people power movement for democracy that began in America on September 17 with an encampment in the financial district of New York City. Inspired by the Egyptian Tahrir Square uprising and the Spanish *acampadas*, we vow to end the monied corruption of our democracy.[58]

These Spanish camps of indignados proclaimed: 'We, the unemployed, the underpaid, the subcontracted, the precarious, the young … demand a change towards a future with dignity.' They declared they were fed up with reforms,

unemployment, banks which have caused the crisis increasing mortgages or taking away homes, and laws limiting people's freedom in the interest of the powerful. 'We blame the political and economic powers for our sad situation and we call for a turn.'[59] Renamed 15-M, the indignados movement maintained impressive citizen mobilization, convening huge public gatherings in cities, towns and villages. It voiced growing demands against government cuts, evictions, corrupt politicians, the growing inequalities of the system. The force of this movement strengthened left-wing parties, notably Podemos. At the same time, the movement expressed a vague 'antisystemic' consciousness against financial powers and political institutions, with a flourishing of alternative media and grassroots legal campaigns against corrupt politicians as well as the development of local alternative, highly participatory associations, such as Ganemos in Madrid and Guanyem in Barcelona, which directly seek local government power without the mediation of any party. 15-M marked a turning point in Spanish politics, the beginning of mass resistance to austerity policies that turned economic crisis into a political crisis.[60]

Occupy was inspirational. Castells enthused: 'what we are living here, and in 706 camps more around the world, has substance, has roots, and whatever forms it takes and whatever will happen, this movement will continue'.[61] Joseph Stiglitz observed of Occupy that 'social protest has found fertile ground everywhere: a sense that the "system" has failed and the conviction that, even in a democracy, the electoral process will not set things right – at least not without strong pressure from the street'.[62] Noam Chomsky described the occupation tactic as 'brilliant' but looked forward to the 'next stage'.[63] Despite extreme efforts by regimes of all sorts to remove its physical presences, the movement flourished for a year or so. Its critical legacy continues.

Unions, usually of the more militant kind, supported these new radical protests in many parts of the world. For instance, in November 2011 the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation organized a workers' march to Tahrir Square to join the Occupy demonstration demanding removal of the military junta and handover to civilian authorities while elections were held.[64] However, the detachment of much official trade unionism from these radical developments was highlighted by the Take the Square movement. It launched its 'People of the World, rise up!!!' online call for people everywhere to peacefully occupy public squares on 19 June 2011, 'to reclaim the public arena and together forge the kind of world we want to live in'. Explicitly critical of unions, Take the Square declared:

> We are the outraged, the anonymous, the voiceless.… No political party, association or trade union represents us. Nor do we want them to … we want to design and create a world where people and nature come first, before economic interests. We want to design and build the best possible world.[65]

An organizer stated: 'Many calls are coming for networked transnational revolutions against the elitist system, demanding real democracy right now. Unions

that are closing their ears and eyes to these demands of the movements are running the risk of becoming irrelevant actors in near future!' Unions, the organizer continued, must join and support these young people, otherwise they should not ask themselves 'why can't we reach out the youth?' The answer to this question, he added, 'lies on the squares of Tunisia, Egypt, UK, Spain, Greece and elsewhere!'[66]

A union retort is provided by British union Unite organizer Ewa Jasiewicz, previously mentioned as an international spokesperson for Iraqi oilworkers. Identifying the new radicalism as largely anarchist in inspiration, Jasiewicz concedes its critique of mainstream unions is valid. Big unions are arbiters and enforcers of social peace, a reinforcement of business as usual, a partner to normalizing the market; and big unions are disempowering in their bureaucracy and hierarchy, though Jasiewicz responds that officers are not the union and if they are selling out, the membership can remove them. Pointedly entitled 'You Only Love Us When We Strike', Jasiewicz' article argues that the idea of 'we always support workers in struggle' but not unions fetishizes strike-time when the painstaking, knock-back and victimization-battling, as well as the small wins that build the conditions for lasting changes, are cast into the space or void of 'social peace'. Invisible struggles and organizing that build up the confidence for confrontation and bigger wins are often guided through union membership and action. Given that casualization, crisis and attacks on workers' resistance continue to cripple unions, Jasiewicz urged anarchists to 'open up to these forms and spaces of organization and be part of them, and influence struggle within and through them, not just when its "hot" to do so, and not without critique either'. This was essential because 'Unions can be fertile places and authentic places of alternative power at a grassroots and wider level. What we can learn and do through their political diversity and potential should not be underestimated.'[67]

Greece 2011–2015: from Eurozone crisis to Syriza

Greece remained an epicentre of working-class resistance to austerity measures. Yanis Varoufakis describes the record austerity imposed on Greece as the 'cynical transfer of irretrievable private losses on to the shoulders of taxpayers as an exercise in "tough love" '; so Greece's national income from which debts had to be repaid diminished by more than a quarter.[68] From the standpoint of the general interest, as Piketty points out, it is normally preferable to tax the wealthy rather than borrow from them. However, Piketty explains it was difficult for Greece to collect more taxes from its wealthier citizens, because they could easily move their money to other European countries, authorities never having taken steps to implement laws and regulations to prevent this. Lacking tax revenues, Greece became obliged to sell public assets, often at fire-sale prices, to those who could not be taxed.[69]

At the height of the 2011 Eurozone crisis, demonstrators scaled the Acropolis to fly a banner protesting the austerity policies imposed by the troika (IMF,

European Commission, European Central Bank). The unprecedented number of strikes persisted, so too did factory occupations, but, as before, not necessarily mobilized through traditional union forms, as mainstream labour organizations continued to be left behind in the wave of popular protests. Base unions and various left-wing organizations played leading roles in these industrial struggles, in campaigns of solidarity with migrants and the broader protest movements against cuts to public spending, and in the proliferation of new local community associations to provide sustenance and shelter to those in most need.[70]

Under the enforced austerity regime, class polarization continued to intensify: large sections of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie became proletarianized; unemployment increased massively and precarious employment expanded. Young workers were especially badly affected.[71] By 2011 Greeks had lost about 40 per cent of their purchasing power since 2008, so were spending much less on goods and services. The unemployment rate grew from 7.5 per cent in September 2008 to 27.9 per cent in June 2013, with the youth unemployment rate rising from 22 per cent to 62 per cent. In 2011, 111,000 Greek companies went bankrupt, 27 per cent higher than in 2010.[72]

One of the many workers' takeovers of bankrupt companies in 2011 was of Viomihaniki Metalleytiki (BioMe), a mining industry parts factory in Thessaloniki. It was deserted by the employers, and workers were unpaid from May 2011 until October when they decided to occupy it and run it as an egalitarian collective of self-managed workers. They invited the unemployed as well as the employed, all people who had experienced the crisis, to support them 'to prove in praxis that we, the workers, can do it without the bosses!' They argued that when factories close one after the other the unemployed grow and the majority of society is sentenced to poverty and misery. Factories being transferred to the workers was the necessary answer to the destruction experienced every day and the only answer to unemployment:

> This struggle must not remain as only the struggle of BioMe but one which in order to acquire a nationwide dimension and become victorious, must be spread to all the closed factories and businesses; because only with the existence of a network of occupied and self-managed factories will BioMe as such manage to survive and become the 'architect' of a different organization of production and of the economy, of an organization that will do away with exploitation, inequalities and hierarchies.[73]

During 2012 the workers' union protected the factory equipment from removal while negotiating the legal establishment of the cooperative, supported by 98 per cent of the workers at a general assembly. In July the union issued a public statement:

> We believe that the occupation and the re-operation of factories and corporations by their workers is the only realistic alternative proposal in face of the ever-increasing exploitation of the working class. The self-organization

> of factories that close down is the only proposal that has the force to mobilize the working class.… We know that the difficulties we shall face in the struggle for the self-management of the factory are many, since state and capital will fiercely stand against it – as a possible victory shall create a precedent and an example for any other struggle in the country. Yet the question of whose hands the production lies in becomes a question of life and death for a working class pushed into degradation. For this reason, the workers' struggles orientated in this direction and the forces standing in solidarity with these struggles should be prepared to clash with state and the administration in order to materialise the occupation of the means of production and the workers' self-management.[74]

BioMe was operating successfully by 2013. Its website quoted Tassos Livaditis: 'It is us who prepare the dough and have no bread, us who dig out the coal yet we are cold. It is us who have nothing and we are coming to get the world.'[75]

Even when profitable, Greek employers manipulated the situation to increase exploitation. Despite a year-to-year profit increase of 30 per cent in 2011, management of Elliniki Halivourgia (Greek Steelworks) in Aspropyrgos on the industrial outskirts of Athens decided in October 2011 to reduce both wages and working hours by 60 per cent due to reduced demand. It was taking advantage of recent legislation giving employers the right to impose 'partial employment' during periods where such action is 'justified' and falling demand proven.[76] When three dozen workers were made redundant on 31 October 2011, a workers' assembly unanimously decided to strike indefinitely. The furnace froze, the machines were turned off and guarded by the workers. A major dispute began, an autonomous, grassroots workers' struggle, but one snubbed by mainstream unions. The wave of solidarity grew. During a general strike on 1 December workers gathered at the factory; and supermarkets in Volos were looted by people who left a communiqué behind stating the goods were for the striking steelworkers as a concrete gesture of solidarity. On 3 December a solidarity motorcycle demonstration was organized. The People's Assembly of Peristeri, a suburb of Athens, issued a solidarity text in support on 9 December: 'The workers are adamant and they escalate their struggle. They do not bend, but they revolt, organize themselves and continue with their struggle showing the light to the working class.'[77] The strike lasted nine months, one of the longest in the southern EU during the past two decades. It created a strong solidarity movement. The government feared the workers' militancy could have a demonstration effect that could trigger broader actions against the austerity-induced spread of precarious work across the country. On 20 July 2012 riot police raided the plant and violently terminated the strike.[78]

As businesses in Greece continued to close or short-change their employees, occupations and autogestión persisted. For example, in January 2012 a 'workers' struggle committee' took control of the patisserie 'Hatzis' in Thessaloniki, because bosses forced employees to work without being formally employed, working six-day weeks with minimal insurance contributions.[79] On 10 February,

workers sacked from mental health support services occupied the health ministry for 48 hours, to coincide with a general strike, protesting against budget cuts of 55 per cent, causing lay-offs, mergers, casualization, work intensification, wage cuts and poorer quality service. The occupation statement pointed out this was the largest mobilization ever in their workplace: 'We call all unions and workers attacked by the [IMF] memorandum's politics of impoverishment and trashing of the social safety-net to support practically our occupation and to take similar initiatives in their own workplaces.'[80]

A few days previously, on 6 February, health workers in Kilkis occupied the local hospital and issued a statement proclaiming it was fully under workers' control and would remain so until wage levels prior to austerity measures were restored:

> Meanwhile, knowing fully well what our social mission and moral obligations are, we will protect the health of the citizens that come to the hospital by providing free healthcare to those in need, and calling on the government to finally accept its responsibilities, overcoming even at the last minute its extreme social ruthlessness.

They asked for solidarity from other workers and support from any media organizations that chose to tell the truth.[81]

The truth was forthcoming from the self-managed newspaper, *Workers of Elefterotypia*, started 15 February 2012 by 800 media workers at *Elefterotypia*, one of the largest newspapers in Greece. On strike since 22 December over six months of unpaid wages, the initiative was in protest against the Greek parliament passing another round of austerity measures. The new newspaper, received enthusiastically by the public, announced: 'we hope to become an alternative source of information during this dictatorship of finance, fighting the terror of bosses and the media who don't want workers having this sort of information in their hands'.[82]

In an attempt to diffuse anger against them but ever behind the popular mood, GSEE and ADEDY announced a general strike on 26 September 2012 against another round of austerity cuts, but timed it for the evening after the voting in parliament. A few days later, the ministry of education announced the closure of 140 higher education departments, widely believed to be directed against the thousands of students developing radical political identities and practices. Also in late September the union of hospital doctors declared they would only accept emergency patients, in protest against not being paid by the health ministry and their salaries having fallen around 40 per cent the previous two years. Early in October, 18 members of the Public Electricity Company workers' union were arrested after union members occupied the company main office in protest against privatization plans and to gain information about the large businesses not charged the special property tax enforced on citizens, which had resulted in poor people having their domestic power supplies cut off.[83]

Paulo Gerbaudo has written of a 'two-speed Europe' to capture the distance between countries where anti-austerity protest movements have won majority

approval and others where they are in the minority. In these latter countries, the effects of the crisis have been experienced more slowly and moderately, either because the impact has been cushioned by a more generous welfare state as in France and Britain, or due to a better economic situation as in Germany, or because household savings have been used to temporarily limit social problems as in Italy. The leading countries for anti-austerity movements are not surprisingly those where the social effects of the crisis have been felt more explosively, notably Spain and Greece, with a quarter of the population and half of young people out of work. The force of their anti-austerity movements saw the remarkable rise of new left parties, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece.[84]

Union involvement in anti-austerity protests has reflected differential working-class experiences of the recession more than a Europe-wide class-conscious solidarity. As Costas Lapavitsas and others have revealed, it is not a case of prudent Germans paying for spendthrift Greeks, but German and Greek workers alike being exploited by austerity-induced cutbacks in public spending and redistribution from labour to capital across the Eurozone.[85] Nonetheless, Heiner Dribbusch has described the difficulties faced by German unions such as Ver.Di, attempting to mobilize against austerity and communicate the fact that the German economy had gained enormously from the economic imbalances in Europe and that Germans were not 'paying for the Greeks', in a context where efforts to reduce the 'burdens' on 'German taxpayers' were widely supported. For Greek and Spanish unionists energized by anti-austerity anger, the EU, the troika and their own governments represented identifiable enemies to target. Dribbusch refers to the 'massive disjunction in terms of the scale and intensity of union activities' exhibited by the European Day of Action on 14 November 2012, organized by the ETUC, which was less a powerful expression of pan-European solidarity and more the reflection of the social division it was mounted to combat.[86]

Other scholars, such as Anne Dufresne, are more upbeat about the Day of Action, pointing to its significance as the first transnational strike on an inter-occupational basis and arguing its contribution to the development of common transnational trade union identities should not be underestimated.[87] However, assessments of labour movement resistance to austerity in Europe broadly agree that the labour movement needs now to be understood as including more informal groups as well as trade unions. Radical activists as well as unionized workers have been at the heart of the resistance movement; workers in precarious forms of employment, often un-unionized, have been amongst the most involved. The networks of solidarity between European unionists have often functioned better at informal and subterranean levels than at higher levels, so informal forms of collective action by workers understood in a broad sense have outflanked official union actions. Unions are not coherent and monolithic units but terrains of debate and internal contestation. This can make evidence of labour movement resistance hard to locate; one needs to know where to look. Transnational solidarity networks between labour organizations certainly exist, affirmed by inquisitive studies of ground-level developments.[88]

Workers' organizations, mostly base unions, have been a leading force in the resistance to austerity measures in Greece. This movement also helped spawn wide grassroots social-solidarity efforts to avert disintegration of social cohesion by ferocious neoliberal policies. An impressive range of bottom-up, radical, social-solidarity initiatives now extensively cover the fields of health, shelter and food for the poor. It seems, according to Sotiris Roussos, that new social bonds are being built around these decentralized, spontaneous enterprises that have taken the form of grassroots collectives, citizens' associations and solidarity networks.[89]

Working-class resistance, and the associated disgrace of the mainstream unions left far behind, reshaped the political landscape, resulting in the spectacular collapse of the traditional social-democratic Pasok party from 43.9 per cent in 2009 to 4.7 per cent in 2015 and the electoral rise of Syriza, built on the broad consensus created by anti-austerity activism in a country massacred by austerity policies.[90] By 2015, these measures demanded under the 240 billion Euro bailout deal had thrown hundreds of thousands of people out of work and left nearly a third of the country without state health insurance.[91]

On 25 January 2015, Syriza swept to victory with its radical pledge to rewrite the terms of the massive bailout deal with the Eurozone. 'The Greek people have written history', said leader Alexis Tsipras as the crowd roared its approval. 'Greece is leaving behind catastrophic austerity, fear and autocratic government.'[92] Continuing strong support for Syriza was reaffirmed by the decisive 'No' vote in the referendum on austerity on 5 July 2015. When austerity was nonetheless reimposed upon Greece in the following weeks, the IMF publicly broke ranks with fellow creditors in the troika, urging significant debt relief and debt restructuring instead of hardline austerity, which has doomed the Greek economy and made debt repayment impossible.[93]

The imposition of austerity is not simply an unpleasant, unavoidable byproduct of the GFC but a political project to consolidate the most uncompromising forms of neoliberal capitalism.[94] It is nonetheless a project fraught with danger for capitalism, as austerity mires the economy in recession or low growth and subjects workers to high unemployment, insecurity and declining living standards. Political rejection and industrial resistance as strident as that in Greece could erupt anywhere or everywhere. On 15 May 2015, 15-M issued a statement marking its fourth anniversary and affirming its presence still in the streets, 'each of us bearing inside the seed of social change'. The four-year manifesto stated that 15-M renounced 'their' wars and occupations, 'their' neoliberal free trade agreements and debts, and 'their austerity programs implemented in the form of privatization of common resources and public services, evictions, wage cuts, loss of rights, unemployment, insecurity, the destruction of the planet and the imposition of a chauvinist, patriarchal system'. 15-M announced it continued to fight for decent employment, the right to a home, good-quality public services, regulation of the banks, progressive taxation, cuts in military spending, freedom, democracy, the cancellation of an illegitimate debt used to dominate, repress and

strangle nations and people, environmental justice and food sovereignty. 'We demand justice, proposing alternatives to the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption.'[95]

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Conclusion

Striking back against Empire

During the immediate post-war period (1945–1975) prior to globalization, strong labour movements in advanced industrialized countries restrained the power of capital. Inequality was at its lowest point in recorded history, as Piketty reveals. Real wage and salary levels were higher for most workers than now. Stronger welfare systems and public services, funded by much steeper progressive taxation, also contributed significantly to working-class living standards. In the 1960s and early 1970s, strike rates were extremely high in OECD countries; and there were episodes of experiments in workers' control. By the late 1970s, corporate and right-wing political elites, especially in Britain and the USA, sought fresh means to subdue and subordinate the working class. In autonomist Marxist terminology, the strength of working-class 'composition' had become highly problematic for capital, which therefore aimed to 'decompose' labour, turning away from Keynesianism and Fordism to develop new forms of attack: neoliberal globalization.[1]

Globalization is a concerted and conscious strategy on the part of capital to increase exploitation of labour on a worldwide scale. The dominant neoliberal narrative nonetheless presents globalization as an inevitable, inescapable, inexorable process occurring due to the internal momentum of capital: a natural phenomenon like the weather. Resistance, by implication, is futile. However, workers, with or without established labour organizations, have acted imaginatively and ingeniously to improve their circumstances in the face of globalization, suggesting resistance is both pointed and productive.

Working-class decomposition is not a permanent or terminal condition. Moreover, between a quarter and a third of occupations and jobs today did not exist 30 years ago.[2] In other words, a quarter and a third of the world's workers are still in the initial stages of class composition. In Sartrian terms, these alienated series of new working-class fractions are not yet fused groups. Or, as Thompson shows, new categories of workers must be created before they can be present at their own making. In the early nineteenth century, it was inconceivable that skilled engineers, heavily implicated in industrial capitalism's rampage against the workers it exploited, would ever be in the vanguard of developing labour movements in advanced economies. Yet the engineers of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were often at the forefront of labour

struggles; industrial capitalism's dependence upon their skills gave them power at the point of production and authority within the broader labour movement. A similar role might be the future for recently spawned workers upon whom informational capitalism relies so heavily, for example, the 'cybertariat' or 'cyber-proletariat'.[3]

The autonomist concept of 'cycles of struggle' (composition, decomposition and recomposition of the working class) illuminates the past, interprets the present and possibly predicts the future. Composition commences, albeit slowly, with newer forms of waged or salaried work, such as IT or call-centre employment, or with workforces new to waged work, such as rural migrant workers in the factories of China and India. For older occupations, recomposition may succeed decomposition. Despite disorientation and even disarray, workers around the world, in developed and developing economies, have adapted and developed innovative ways of organizing and mobilizing. At present these are tentative and often faltering new directions for labour, but indicate the ongoing invention of forms of organization and struggle that add to the history of class conflict and throw down new challenges to capital.

The transition to post-Fordism in developed economies has weakened traditional union forms. However, workers' organizations of various sorts have developed novel methods of industrial action to disrupt post-Fordist 'lean production'. In particular, they have exploited corporations' reliance on JIT which renders them highly vulnerable to industrial disruption. Workers in one small part of vertically integrated supply chains have successfully halted production of entire chains to press their demands. The growth of smaller, decentralized, casualized workplaces, an important aspect of post-Fordism, has been confronted by faster and more flexible forms of mobilization than traditional union-building. For example, the coordinated, repeated nationwide-walkouts of staff at fast-food outlets in the USA have generated huge publicity and pressured employers to improve wages.

Computer-mediated communication has facilitated these new ways of mobilizing. It also assists unions to organize workers in difficult industrial relations circumstances, for example the rise of cyberunionism as a cost-effective way to organize post-Fordist workforces. Union decline cannot be reversed simply by going online, but sophisticated use of computer-mediated communication at each point in its development has enabled unions to reach out more easily to members, potential members and the public. The interactivity of Web 2.0 has been taken on board, even to the point of virtual industrial action. At local, regional, national and international level, workers' organizations have utilized the technology to aid their struggles and to advertise more broadly the benefits of collective organization.

An inspiring aspect of labour in the twenty-first century is the emergence of troublesome new labour movements in the lower-wage economies to which capital has remorselessly relocated itself in the past few decades. These rapidly industrializing areas have become centres of working-class composition and increasing industrial unrest. China in particular is a major site of workers' struggles.

In the especially challenging case of sweatshops in EPZs and elsewhere, workers have allied with civil-society actors to name and shame corporations, with some successes. This tactic is pursued because workers in horizontally integrated supply chains such as the apparel industry cannot exercise power at the point of production as effectively as in vertically integrated supply chains.

Labour movements have a long history of internationalism, but new highly developed forms of concerted labour transnationalism have been established in the past two decades to confront capital mobility. The dramatic shift in patterns of global production as corporations spread their operations to lower-wage countries has produced real and potential gains for worldwide labour mobilization, because the capital mobility that renders labour transnationalism essential also encourages it. Workers' organizations in developed economies understand the need to unite with the emergent labour movements of the developing world to overcome the corporate divide-and-rule strategy of capital flight or threatened capital flight, which puts downward pressures on wages everywhere. Transnational corporate structures have helped foster novel forms of transnational labour mobilization: an injury to a distant worker becomes an injury to all and may therefore be resisted by workers elsewhere. Global Unions now exist to present a more coherent united front to improve wages and conditions around the world; and less formal rank-and-file solidarity campaigns have also proliferated, aided by computer-mediated communication.

Globalizing capitalism has taken particular advantage of workers who are vulnerable because of their sex or race/ethnicity. Capital is highly mobile while labour is restricted in its movement and often vilified if it seeks to migrate. The super-exploitation of vulnerable workers is aided by prejudice against them. Unions have recognized the importance of counteracting increased workforce fragmentation by collective strategies and solidarity actions. Their heightened inclusivity in recent decades includes particular focus on organization and mobilization of marginalized workers, as the phenomenon of social-movement unionism attests. Against the odds in many locations, the planetary working class in the making is challenging its fragmentation by globalizing capital.

Unions have sometimes been less quick to acknowledge the importance of transcending divisions in workforces based on employment status. Increasing precarization of work is a crucial feature of globalization, as are higher levels of unemployment caused by capital relocation and displacement of human labour by technological advances. Where unions have failed to represent precariously employed workers or ignored the needs of unemployed workers, new organizations have emerged to organize and mobilize. In notable instances, workers threatened with unemployment by factory closure have occupied and recuperated these workplaces to run them under various forms of workers' control, a pattern of defiance that might become increasingly significant.

Labour movements have often assumed a leading role in resistance to the incessant marketization that characterizes the globalizing period. Not just workers but increasing numbers of citizens in general are adversely affected by

constant pillaging of the public realm and erosion of the commons. The terminology of 'community unionism' has emerged to describe how unions have frequently used their resources and power to lead broad coalitions of people in opposition to privatizations and public-sector cuts. In addition to significant successes, this positioning of workers' organizations as defenders of the public interest is a development with continuing potential for future forms of labour movement organization.

When capitalism is in crisis, as is its recurrent tendency, workers bear the brunt when workplaces close down, and wages and public services deteriorate. In addition to these 'normal' forms of crisis, transnational agencies of globalizing capitalism have imposed deliberate regimes of austerity in various countries and circumstances around the world to manufacture crisis conditions that aid redistribution from labour to capital. Commencing with the notorious SAPs in Africa and South America late last century, varieties of austerity have been experienced in most countries, especially since the GFC. Labour movements played an important role in protests against SAPs; and have been involved in the widespread opposition to recent austerity policies. Spectacularly enforced recently in Greece, workers there have shown resilience and determination; but they have expressed their resistance to austerity by establishing new unions when mainstream unions failed to articulate and act upon popular hostility to austerity.

The situation in Greece highlights the fact that workers' organizations transform themselves when necessary. Where existing unions have been unable or unwilling to defend workers' interests, workers have in many instances formed new unions, sometimes ones rooted in older traditions of anarchism and syndicalism. Around the world, alternative, highly class-conscious and militant unions are engaging in novel forms of direct action as well as the tried and proven tactic of striking when strategically appropriate. In addition, methods of industrial defence and struggle have emerged that do not require or depend upon union formation. The same forces of globalization that have caused workers so much grief not only encourage but also enable them to develop creative responses.

Resistance to globalization is far from futile, because there is one problem that will always remain with capital: its ultimate dependence upon, and therefore the inherent power of, labour. This is the commodity upon which globalizing capital inescapably relies for its reproduction. Class composition is in a state of constant flux, but because labour is essential for profit-making, capital cannot destroy its antagonist.[4] Autonomist Marxism does not, as some might argue, replace the determinism of capital with the determinism of labour. Autonomism acknowledges the actual power of capital and practical subordination of labour; but stresses the inherent power of labour due to its autonomy and capital's dependence upon it. It is able thereby to make sense of the cycles of struggle that intrigue labour historians: the constant and continuing capacity of labour, again and again throughout history, not only to contest the power of capital but, in so doing, to influence the subsequent development of capitalism. In Silver's words: 'Labour unrest is shaped by *and shapes* world-economic and political processes.'[5]

Capital's recent increased power vis-à-vis labour is consistent with the upward trend in capital's share of income, as Piketty reveals.[6] By the same token, any improvement in labour's power in the future should bring better returns for labour. Whatever might happen, an autonomist Marxist perspective suggests that the future course of events will be shaped by labour, the dynamic subject, the constantly problematic other for capital. If labour does not compose and recompose, 'the risk of a drift toward oligarchy is real', as Piketty warns.[7]

Labour's autonomy from capital also makes possible a postcapitalist future. Unlike capital, for which labour is crucial, labour can exist independently of capital. This makes cooperative forms of production under workers' control achievable within capitalism, even if difficult, as the successful instances of autogestión, indicate; it also points to transformation within and beyond capitalism. In 2004, Hardt and Negri's *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* depicts the multitude as 'the living alternative that grows within Empire', a network 'that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common'.[8] *Commonwealth*, the final of the Hardt and Negri trilogy that began with *Empire*, articulates the project of resistance of Multitude against Empire both 'within and against' it. The Multitude is 'learning the art of self-rule and investing lasting democratic forms of social organisation' through sharing and participating in the 'common'.[9]

Paul Mason argues the abolition of capitalism has already begun in the spontaneous rise of collaborative production, for example Wikipedia, made for free by volunteers. He predicts postcapitalism will mature within capitalism just as capitalism did within feudalism. 'Almost unnoticed, in the niches and hollows of the market system, whole swathes of economic life are beginning to move to a different rhythm. Parallel currencies, time banks, cooperatives and self-managed spaces have proliferated.' Mason contends they exist because they trade in the currency of postcapitalism: free time, networked activity and free stuff. 'It seems a meagre and unofficial and even dangerous thing from which to craft an entire alternative to the global system, but so did money and credit in the age of Edward III.'[10] Mason's vision is welcome and hopefully of portent; but the 'currency of postcapitalism' he describes is labour, whether free or remunerated. Wikipedia is the product of labour. Postcapitalism is possible because of the autonomy of labour from capital.

For postcapitalism to be realized, the planet needs the care that capitalism left to its own devices will never provide, because capitalism necessarily damages the environment. Capitalist economies underuse labour resources and overuse environmental resources. Corporations tend both to reduce labour costs and use the cheapest production methods possible, regardless of ecological consequence. Thus employment options are restricted at the same time as the planetary environment is degraded. Globalizing capitalism has multiplied to a dangerous extent the destructive impact of capitalism on both the workers of the world and the environment of the planet. Working-class interests and environmental imperatives are compatible and complementary, because truly sustainable employment utilizes labour rather than resources. The ITUC states it 'supports the moral

imperative to both preserve an inhabitable planet and to profit from the jobs that climate action can deliver'.[11] However, more might be needed than support for moral imperatives. The red-green sustainability project on which the future of the planet rests might ultimately depend on working-class power at the point of production, on the withdrawal of labour from continuing complicity in capitalism's environmental irresponsibility.[12] To avert ecological catastrophe, labour could express its autonomy by choosing, in Negri's words, 'to put the soul to work', to experience the positive, creative, radical alternative of 'the refusal of work'.[13]

Notes

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