

ORGANIZING THE “UNORGANIZED”: VARIETIES OF TRANSNATIONAL TRADE UNION COLLABORATION AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN TWO INDIAN CITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that local contexts are critical determinants of successful global unionism. It presents findings from ethnographic research on transnational union cooperation in two major Indian cities: Bangalore and Kolkata. The main findings suggest an apparent contradiction between the perceived nature of global unionism as a standardizing practice and the degree to which local actors and conditions influence the outcomes of transnational campaigns. The article explains the variation in the ways that actors in each city relate to the larger campaign based on historical, cultural, and social circumstances.

The recent surge of interest in transnational labor activism confronts scholars with two immediate paradoxes. One is that almost all of this activity has taken place where we would least expect it, outside the purview of the International Trade Union Confederation, the main body charged with orchestrating the global union movement. Scholars have done a substantial job in covering this ground through studies of codes of conduct, international framework agreements, loopholes in global trade pacts, and direct union transnationalism. The second paradox—that effective global unionism relies, in the final analysis, mostly on local conditions—is far less evident in the literature.

In order to understand the interaction between global campaigns and different local union contexts, this article undertakes a comparative study of a dynamic

transnational campaign in the private security industry within two prominent Indian cities: Bangalore and Kolkata. Both places have been the subject of numerous studies of urbanization, metropolitan restructuring, techno-industrial development, and global cities, but far less has been written on how these changes have impacted the lives of the masses of service sector workers who make such transformations possible.

Although the global campaign originally attempted to standardize practices and results across a variety of countries, I show that local constraints and opportunities presented unique challenges that fundamentally transformed the strategies and tactics, leading to different outcomes, even within India. While some research has assessed the local *impacts* of transnational labor activism (Niforou, in press), the argument here comes from the opposite direction, suggesting that local contexts have a direct influence on the feasibility of global campaigns. Moreover, while important studies have argued that transnational labor advocacy has the tendency to undermine the autonomy and power of local movements (Seidman, 2008), the case examined here describes a campaign that, while inspired by global priorities, is largely driven by local struggles and actors. It suggests a cautious optimism about the prospects for authentic labor internationalism where others have asserted an overriding pessimism (Burawoy, 2010).

The campaign began when the U.S.-based Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and UNI Global Union (UNI) sought to gain traction within the world's largest security firm, British-owned G4S. After looking for allies around the world, it found willing partners in India, the company's largest and fastest-growing market. The campaign, which is still ongoing, generally occurred in two phases. In the first phase, Indian unions assisted in the overall global struggle to win an international framework agreement with the company, an instrument that tries to establish new rights for private security guards around the world, including basic labor standards, minimum wages, nondiscrimination, and overtime pay. The international framework instrument was agreed to; the agreement also granted G4S workers neutrality, or the right to organize a union without management interference.

In the second phase, unions in Bangalore and Kolkata used this formal agreement as grounds to build unions within the company, though each took a different approach, as I demonstrate below. I find that the unions' divergent approaches in the two cities are based on (1) global-local union relationships, (2) traditions of state patronage, and (3) the legacies of labor internationalism and union imperialism. I also inquire into the possibility of union revitalization, but I conclude that the unions are indicative of the larger picture within India. That is, despite recent efforts to change union conduct, and slight possibilities emerging from structural changes, there is still much to do before unions can reverse their membership decline and substantially transform their organizations.

I have argued elsewhere that global agreements can have "mobilization-type" impacts, by helping local unions forge new organizing campaigns (McCallum,

2011). That is, however, not the case here, where the global campaign instead provided the basis on which an important social dialogue process was able to develop, leading to potentially large-scale political reforms of the private security industry nationally. Therefore, we can say that the global agreement had "legislative-type" impacts in India.

This article draws on approximately 50 in-depth interviews with unionists, employers, and security guards, as well as on union documents and observation of meetings between August 2009 and July 2010. It is divided into three parts. First, I briefly outline the contours of Indian labor relations and trade union development, including the relationship of both to the fast-growing private security industry. Second, I provide an ethnographic narrative of my comparative case study. Finally, I discuss the significance of transnational collaboration for each union in the two cities and its implications for understanding the prospects for global unionism to impact local struggles.

DYNAMICS OF INDIAN UNIONISM

Some have suggested that union transnationalism is an unlikely phenomenon in India, based on the premise that the exceptional nature of Indian industrial relations makes it fundamentally incompatible with other varieties of unionism, thereby militating against successful cross-national cooperation (Kuruville et al., 2002). Indeed, the practice of international unionism is largely absent from Indian labor historiography, except for the colonial-era union imperialism emanating from the UK (Busch, 1983). Moreover, today India is not integrated into the systems of regional trade union organization and has remained steadfast in its commitment against global trade-labor linkages. Aside from some recent ad hoc attempts, Indian unions have only a slim record of transnational collaboration. The current instance of transnational collaboration, however, demonstrates that Indian and North American unions have been able to overcome the unique aspects of their own national systems.

Labor in Postcolonial India

Circumstances for Indian workers today are not circumscribed by colonialism, but they owe much to the legacy of industrial relations that was born prior to independence. When labor was relatively strong and committed to mobilization-based strategies, employment protection and income stability were guaranteed to labor in public works projects through the Industrial Disputes Act and the Factories Act, both of which survive today. Moreover, for six decades, excepting the two-year interlude (1975–1977) of Indira Gandhi's Emergency, workers enjoyed a panoply of formal democratic rights. The political system therefore ensured worker protections despite low union densities and an erratic commitment to organizing, inscribing on trade unions a deep dependency on particular political

parties and loyalty to these parties, a persistent phenomenon today. Nevertheless, paradoxically, despite high levels of institutional support, the Indian labor movement remains enfeebled.

In the decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the state began retreating from the promises of “Nehruvian socialism” amid widespread restructuring of the global political economy (Frankel, 2005). The addition of the Contract Labour Act to India’s myriad legislative statutes introduced employment flexibility to the Indian industrial relations landscape (Hill, 2009). These developments undermined union densities and set the stage for further liberalization policies in the early 1990s (Das, 2000).

From Dirigisme to Neoliberalism

Many regard the July 1991 announcement of the New Economic Policy as a decisive moment in Indian history, a defining feature of the transition from state planning to neoliberalism.

Kuruville and Erickson (2002) argue that the central tendency of Indian industrial relations has been transformed since the early 1990s from an authoritarian logic of maintaining labor peace to a logic promoting labor flexibility. It is popular to stress the legacy of dirigisme as anathema today, as much has changed since liberalization, with enormous implications for unions and workers (Venkataratnam, 1998). The new policies ended the system of licensing procedures in manufacturing (the “license permit raj”), liberalized the capital markets and terms of entry for foreign investment, and increased the development of export-processing zones (Balasubramanyam & Mahambare, 2001; Hensman, 2010), which had the cumulative effect of generating new interstate rivalries for investment, precipitating a race to the bottom of labor standards inside the country and increasing work-seeking migration (Bhattacharjee, 2001). The last 15 years of reforms demonstrate a disjuncture between the perceived nature of Indian labor law as rigid, and its actual flexibility (Sharma, 2006). Moreover, beneath India’s economic boom, the delinking of growth and employment, combined with declining unionization, has resulted in fewer prospects for upward mobility for the majority of India’s people.

Collectively, these changes have increased the challenges facing Indian trade unions. Though the challenges are common to many developing countries (Kuruville et al., 2002), they are compounded in India by an institutional framework alleviating labor-capital relations that has served to amplify labor’s structural deficits rather than abridge them (Chibber, 2005). A primary obstacle to the trade unions is the growing tendency of Indian employers to informalize the labor force. Against the predictions of development theory, growth has not been labor-absorbing. Rather, liberalization has actually promoted employment flexibility, so much so that today the vast majority of Indian workers are located in the “unorganized” or informal sector. It should be noted that the terms “organized”

and "unorganized" are the official titles given to what most scholars typically call the "formal" and "informal" sectors of the economy, respectively. Private security guards, such as those employed by G4S, fall within this sector because their conditions of work and quality of life are so inherently precarious.

However, because so many enterprises straddle the divide between the two categories, the work lives of formal sector laborers are anything but stable. The data show definitively that formal sector workers have lost jobs not to mechanization but to contract laborers (Sengupta & Sett, 2000). For these reasons, animosity between "organized" and "unorganized" laborers has grown at the same time that the distinction between each sector has become blurred.

While the immediate effects of liberalization have been largely negative for unions, unanimous political support for liberalization encouraged a slight but noticeable rupture between unions and their political parties, which many in the labor movement regard as a positive development. Despite reports of declining membership, Uba (2008) finds an increase in union action during the liberalization period. These protests, largely described as blowback against the wide-ranging support by the state, parties, and employers for neoliberal policy, took the form of strikes, mass marches, walkouts, traffic blockades, and hunger strikes. Though these actions did not succeed in blocking liberalization schemes, they did slow the process considerably (Candland, 1999), and they increased public sentiment against it: public opinion against privatization increased from 34% in 1996 to 48% by 2004 (Yadav, 2004). In the middle of the market-based reforms, Indian unions also won groundbreaking legislation to benefit poor families through a massive public works program known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Bhowmik, 2009).

Therefore, though they are a central part of the equation, neoliberal developments do not explain the totality of labor's weakness in India. The weakness of labor in India was in no way preordained by structural constraints, but rather owes much to the strategic choices of labor unions themselves. Today it is also important to contrast the discourse of labor flexibility and informality with the extreme structuring of work relations along a matrix of nonclass identities: caste, gender, religion, language, and age. These sociocultural identities are still strong determinants of what people do and the conditions under which they do it, and they give rise to the political formations that inhibit class formation. As Barbara Harriss-White and Nandini Gooptu (2001: 236) argue:

If class is first a struggle over class and second a struggle between classes, we can say the overwhelming majority of the Indian workforce is still kept engaged in the first struggle, while capital, even though stratified and fractured, is engaged in the second.

These dynamics bring us even closer to an understanding of the massive fissures among workers in India, and the impact these have on unified working-class mobilization. Today, while numbers vary, approximately 2% of

the 47 million Indian workers belong to a trade union—the vast majority of which are concentrated in the public sector—spread over five major union federations, each controlled by a political party. Therefore the Indian labor market consists primarily of the expanding unorganized sector—now up to about 94% of the workforce—and a tiny formal sector that exists as a protected oasis, a happenstance that has given rise to the prevailing conception of Indian union members as card-holders in an elite club who are unwilling to share their privilege with others.

As firm-level unions proliferated independently of affiliation to national federations in the 1980s, unions multiplied quickly (RoyChowdhury, 2003). There are about 66,000 registered trade unions today, though some estimate the actual number might be as high as 100,000, organized along myriad axes. In this scenario, fierce interunion competition has militated against solidarity. Rudolph and Rudolph (1987) have referred to the Indian situation as “involutional pluralism,” a term used to describe the ironic multiplication and simultaneous weakening of interest groups.

Even within this context of weakness and extreme labor pluralism, however, there are exceptional developments as well. First, we see a slow movement toward independent unionism outside the sphere of party control, especially embodied by the creation of the National Centre for Labor and the New Trade Union Initiative, an umbrella organization of this new movement (Bhattacharjee & Azcarate, 2006; Davala, 1996; RoyChowdhury, 2003). The Self Employed Women’s Association, a union-type formation arising from Gujarati garment unions, has since the early 1970s been a voice in the wilderness within India, though it has recently been joined by other informal sector movements (Gallin, 2001). Agarwala (2006, 2008) explains that the strategies of *bidi* (a thin cigarette) makers and construction workers have changed as their industries have become increasingly informalized. Where once these groups targeted employers and aimed for worker rights, they now make demands on the state and demand welfare benefits instead. However, whereas in Agarwala’s studies this is due to the plethora of tiny employers that characterize the informal sector and are unable to really bargain with their employees, in the case of the security guards studied here it results from the company’s power to resist bargaining, which encourages the union to demand that the state intervene. These trends have led some in the labor movement to assert that Indian trade unions are in the midst of a wide-scale revitalization process. While these examples highlight an important degree of restructuring, it is premature to announce the arrival of a new phase of unionism.

This brief discussion helps us situate the case study within the context of a historically weak and fragmented trade union movement and amid some experimentation for renewal led by informal sector worker organizations. The other important context to consider when evaluating the local pressures on unionism, in this case, is the remarkable rise of the security industry.

THE INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT OF PRIVATE SECURITY

The expansion of the private security industry in India has paralleled the transition to free market capitalism detailed above, but it has also exceeded typical service sector growth. Today, private guards outnumber public police about 3:1. The service sector grew quickly in the 1980s, and further accelerated in the 1990s, averaging 7.5% growth per year, supporting industry and agriculture, which grew on average by 5.8% and 3.1% respectively (Gordon & Gupta, 2004). The most famous dimension of the growth in services has been in software and information technology-enabled services, although the growth in services in India has been much more broad based than just in IT.

Private security and facilities services are located at the intersection of many growth industries in India. G4S, the company under scrutiny in this case study, offers clients a variety of standard services for a security company: guarding, cash transit, technology-based security (cameras, radio, etc.), executive protection, armed guarding, and automobile fleet tracking. However, it expanded its services in 2010. It now produces garments for both Indian and British uniformed personnel, and has specially designed security solutions for the IT and IT-enabled sector. It has also started a division called FirstSelect, which links corporate clients with potential employees. Its "facilities management" department advertises itself as a "one-stop-shop" for a variety of solutions that essentially give G4S a monopoly at worksites that require multiple service inputs.

G4S employs 150,000 people, making it by far the market leader and also the largest transnational employer in the country, with over twice as many employees as the next largest competitor, TopsGroup. Over the two decades for which G4S and its parent companies have operated in India, it has "created a new job" every 80 minutes, or 32 per day (G4S, 2009). Since it has grown fast by mergers and acquisitions, most of these jobs are not actually "new." However, they are impressive figures, nonetheless. In March 2009, the New Delhi magazine *Business Standard* reported that G4S planned to increase its Indian labor force by 20% in the next year, bucking the trend of hiring freezes and layoffs during the global recession.

Because of this expansive growth, G4S credits itself with nothing less than inventing the Indian security industry. According to a local manager, 15 years ago a security guard in India was a "guy in a dirty lungi holding a big stick." G4S, as the largest Indian security company, has helped to foster the growth of an industry that in earlier years was simply an afterthought, nurtured by the rapid growth of the IT sector in a few large cities—Bangalore, Hyderabad, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Mysore. Since the 2009 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, and with the continued tension in Kashmir, the rationale for private security has also been strengthened, as the military has been stretched increasingly thin. Filling these more serious security voids has been made possible in light of G4S's

2006 acquisition of Armor group, a private military contractor with operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and India-controlled Kashmir.

G4S claims to be the most densely unionized security company in the world, with over 200 union agreements in force. To this it has added the global agreement with UNI, technically called an ethical employment partnership. In the Asia-Pacific region, about 20% of its operations are unionized, roughly equivalent to the level in North America.

Nevertheless, G4S security guards in India still live in brutal poverty, and guards regularly report illegally low wages, contributions to pensions being withheld, and unfair treatment at work, all of which were included in a complaint filed by UNI through the UK contact point for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The job of security guard is characterized by part-time employment in the informal sector.

This introductory section outlines the context for the article's case study: the transnational campaign conducted between UNI and local Indian unions. In the first phase, Indian workers joined the larger movement of unions around the world to secure the global agreement. In the second phase, unions in Bangalore and Kolkata have implemented the agreement in different ways, and in so doing they have tried to restructure their organizations.

CASE STUDY

Phase I

During a 2008 UNI conference held at SEIU headquarters in New York City, a UNI staff person, speaking about the global campaign against G4S, said, "We thought, 'If we can do this in New York, New Jersey, New Mexico, even New South Wales, we can do it in New Delhi.' But we were wrong. It turned out that we couldn't do it in any of those places without doing it in New Delhi first."

UNI originally thought the global agreement would have universal applicability. In many ways they thought and hoped it would function close to the way it did in Johannesburg. But local constraints presented obstacles that forced a different kind of campaign in India. Because India is G4S's largest market, and collaborative work among the unions was facilitated by a common ability to use the English language, the campaign in India became a critical component of a multipronged pressure strategy during the global campaign.

SEIU leaders visited India in 2005 in search of partner unions in the private security industry. The labor movement's historical disunity—on the basis of political party affiliation, caste, geography, and religion—meant it was necessary to first create a new organization of the warring factions. By 2007, after completing a tour of the country's seven largest labor federations, The Service Employees International Union, UNI's largest affiliate, settled on the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), which was affiliated with the Congress

Party and the Communist-controlled Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU). Historically, the INTUC unions were successful in building density in the large public sector enterprises in Karnataka, whereas CITU's strength had always been concentrated in West Bengal.

The resulting organization, the Indian Security Workers Organizing Initiative (ISWOI), is perhaps the first organization of its kind in India, as it bridges deep political divides. ISWOI is composed of a 10-person governing council, consisting of UNI staff and representatives of CITU and INTUC and their affiliates in the security industry. Its quarterly meetings often include management representatives as well. This deliberative body is chaired by an SEIU staffer in the United States and coordinated by an India-based UNI staffer, and it makes all the decisions concerning the strategy of the campaign.

By late 2007, UNI had also established three offices in India to coordinate a variety of campaigns throughout the country; these offices were called Union Development and Organizing Centers (UNIDOC). The private security campaign was notable for focusing exclusively on workers within the vast informal sector. To shine a spotlight on these invisible workers, UNI exploited the dubious claim of the country to be a large democracy with a growing economy in its report, "Inequality beneath India's Economic Boom" (UNI, 2009). The document demonstrates that G4S guards receive poverty wages, often below the legal minimum, work long hours without overtime pay, have no job security, and are denied the right to organize independent unions. UNI also hired legal experts who produced similarly damning profiles and case studies of the company that framed the debate in terms of political and human rights.

ISWOI began to play a larger role in the global effort, by applying pressure locally to G4S. First, local unions engaged the G4S management in a number of legislative battles, kick-starting a process aimed at a reinterpretation of the confusing array of labor laws. In June 2007, ISWOI unions also participated in global demonstrations involving dozens of security guard unions around the globe. When G4S refused to act favorably, security guard unions pressured the organizing committee of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, the \$1.6 billion multisport event held in India, to deny the lucrative security contract to G4S, based on its poor human rights track record, causing an uproar within the country's business community. These actions publicly shamed the company and threatened its profit margins in its largest market, presenting a questionable profile of the company to European investors.

In December 2008, after five years of fighting the union on multiple fronts in multiple countries, the company unexpectedly capitulated. The decision of the company's British management to submit to the demands of the global agreement was supposed to ripple through its subsidiary branches around the world and impact all 150,000 G4S employees in India. However, when asked why his company had settled with the union, an Indian G4S manager shrugged his shoulders. "It's not my job to ask those questions," he says. "The decision

was not ours.” The failure of the parent company to adequately inform its affiliates, especially those in its largest market, was the prelude to a confusing process of implementation.

Phase II

After the successful negotiation of the global agreement, among the first organizational decisions was to determine the scope of practice for each union in ISWOI, as it became clear that the historical divides were actually too large to bridge. It was then decided that INTUC would have sole organizing rights over G4S workers in Bangalore and Kochi, whereas CITU would operate in Kolkata and New Delhi. The strict division of labor has been an essential aspect of the campaign strategy. During the past two years, however, jurisdictional battles nonetheless have broken out between the two organizations in Mysore, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Pondicherry, and New Delhi.

Both INTUC and CITU began their collaboration with UNI in 2007, when ISWOI was formally adopted as the campaign’s strategic framework, but its work increased after the global agreement was signed, as it offered an initial promise of worksite access and employer neutrality. UNI organizers, transplanted full-time to India, mentored local unionists in Delhi, Bangalore, Kolkata, and Kochi on the ins and outs of North American organizing unionism—strategic mapping, one-on-one conversations with workers, data collection, and an explicit focus on the market-dominant company. However, despite a common cause and a shared organization, the unions have taken markedly different approaches to implementing and defending the global agreement. We can examine the differences as they play out in Bangalore and Kolkata.

Bangalore

In Bangalore, UNI worked with the Private Security Guards Union (PSGU), an INTUC affiliate aligned with the Congress Party. In the late 1980s, twin brothers Muthappa and Muddappa formed the first garment workers’ union in the state. By 2005, security guards at union garment factories began clamoring for unionization as well, which became the inspiration for the PSGU. Muthappa has played a critical role in the construction of ISWOI and is probably the most committed Indian unionist within its ranks. Although politically he is a socialist, he prefers the union politics of the Congress Party to that of the Communist unions.

In 2007, as per UNI’s suggestion, the PSGU committed itself to building density primarily within G4S. At 4,300 members, the union has roughly tripled in size since it began working with UNI. UNI paid for another PSGU staffer to work in Bangalore to help motivate G4S workers to join the union. All in all, despite significant membership gains, organizing has been difficult. The company has intensified its retaliation against organizers and member activists. On-site

violence, related to union politics, has become more common as well, as the organizing environment has created divides among guards.

However, though still nascent, and frustrated by management's stance, the union activity has produced important results for security guards statewide. Union pressure has obliged G4S to offer appointment letters to new hires, detailing the terms of the employment relationship, disregarding the practice of using labor brokers and other third-party entities to hire guards. The company has also begun to pay statutory benefits such as minimum wages, more regular contributions to workers' pensions, overtime pay, and bonuses to workers based on seniority, finally bringing the company into compliance with the Contract Labour Act. Because these gains apply to workers company-wide, not only to G4S union members, these increases will effectively double the value of the salaries of 150,000 informal sector workers, who currently earn approximately 200 rupees per day, or about four U.S. dollars. Finally, thousands of identity cards have been issued to union members; this affords them an opportunity to open a bank account or receive a loan, a gain that has been shown to be vital to other campaigns of informal workers (Agarwala, 2006).

Historically, the union had built membership through mass recruitment meetings, often targeting politically radical workers, at which union leaders extolled the virtues of union membership and then passed out some union cards to sign. The meetings were advertised by militant workers or staff who handed out leaflets as workers left the jobsite. The union began to shift its recruitment process under the influence of UNI to focus on one-on-one meetings with guards at worksites and homes. The absorption of a North American style "organizing model" is deep and obvious. Leaders in Bangalore credit UNI and its organizers with disseminating a new way of building the union, one that they are eager to extend to their own work. During several meetings with worker activists, for example, there were lively debates on the value of mapping and how best to carry it out. Mapping refers to the process by which unions lay out the industrial landscape of a particular place through outreach and field research in order to determine what the strengths and weaknesses of a particular company or industry may be. Factors to be taken into account include the relative density of employees to managers, financial assets, the proximity of other, similar union businesses, and so forth. Admittedly, the organizing orientation has deprived local organizers of some of their overt political motivation, and replaced it with a heavy reliance on numbers, as in the U.S.-style model.

"Now, [organizing is] a science," says one PSGU organizer. "We have a plan of action. We have a strategy. We have number goals and we must reach them. That is something new. It is a good thing."

The PSGU has also incorporated the global agreement into its organizing message, and has translated it into regional languages such as Kannada, Tamil, Malayalam, and Telugu. In October 2009, at a meeting in a slum on the outskirts of Bangalore, PSGU organizers spoke with security guards about the global

campaign and the systematic way in which they were carrying out an organizing plan. The meeting took place in a building that houses about 100 workers. It is a common landing pad for new migrants from Assam, Orissa, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh, poorer states from which many security guards in Karnataka immigrate. At first, workers were hesitant, and conversation in Hindi and Kannada was stilted. But after an older worker who was already a union member spoke up in Tamil, 12 others signed cards.

The company has yet to recognize the union, has been delaying discussions over economic issues for years and has carried out a public assault on union leaders. Reports by guards of physical and emotional abuse are common, with one union activist claiming he was pushed to attempt suicide as a result of company harassment. G4S has in fact initiated contact with rival unions, as an anti-ISWOI strategy. In this environment, the global agreement has been completely ineffective in bringing the company to a union-neutral stance, which has led some in the union, including ISWOI council members, to conclude that the global agreement is a “waste of paper that we cannot afford.”

Because the global agreement technically restricts the union from industrial action and certain forms of public protest—unauthorized strikes, wildcat strikes, picketing—the PSGU has generally relied on ISWOI council meetings to voice its concerns to high-ranking G4S management. In June 2010, however, its union leaders swore not to attend another ISWOI meeting for the purpose of discussing the global agreement with G4S, citing the company’s massive intransigence, sentiments shared by local INTUC and Congress Party leaders as well.

Speaking to the frustration of local unionists, a UNI staffer in Geneva says: “We have an issue of expectations. . . . They [the Indian unionists] thought that this thing [the global agreement] would solve all our problems. That the company would react. Well, it has, actually. It has, but not the way they’d like. We need to show them that this can work. Patience is not easy to come by here, though.”

Kolkata

In Kolkata, where patience is in even more limited supply, CITU has taken a decidedly different approach to implementing the global agreement. Membership in CITU’s security guard union hovers around 15,000, more than the membership of the other ISWOI unions combined. It has been organizing security workers for 15 years, longer than any of the other ISWOI unions. Approximately one-third have joined since the global agreement was signed in 2008. However, CITU has not focused its campaigns on G4S workers to any great degree, choosing to build membership within any company with willing workers.

For more than three decades, CITU had relied on its deep connection to the West Bengal’s Communist-led Left Front government to secure wage gains and provide a favorable terrain for union activity. Its collaboration with UNI has not been deep, and it has generally resisted the adoption of new strategies to help

it to grow. Instead, it has continued to rely on its function as a labor broker, connecting unemployed workers with temporary jobs in informal industries like security, contract cleaning, domestic work, and others. It has amended this strategy, however, by adding a postscript to its usual message: "We tell them [the security guards] the company wants us to be in unions; that is the strongest message of why the company signed the global agreement in the first place. Then they will join."

After three decades of central planning, the Left Front government maintained decent relationships with large employers that allowed a degree of cooperation with CITU. Though this is not its stated *modus operandi*, this strategy became clear during a meeting with security guards, during which many of them claimed to support CITU's security guard union because it found them work in an otherwise jobless economy. The union does this on a rotating basis to ensure fairness and to secure the loyalty of as many workers as possible. Workers sign a union card and take a number, and eventually CITU connects them with a job.

The global agreement has not been incorporated into the union's organizing strategy, and there is no real interest in the organizing model. A CITU organizer explains:

We have our way. We don't go and pretend to be from somewhere else and ask to fill in this survey and ask all these questions and then come back days later and say, "Oh, hi, I am from the union, from CITU." No, we go there and we tell the people we are the union. We tell them to join, to be united and strong. That's the way we do it. We have always done it this way.

He raises two important points that pertain to the implementation of the organizing model. The first touches on the issue of how unions approach nonunion workers, the second on data collection. Many North American labor organizers understand a union organizing drive as having distinct phases; first secret and underground, and then public. For the security unions in India, the idea of beginning covertly was new and at first disconcerting. Though the PSGU has come to see the value of this step with time, CITU has remained skeptical.

However, CITU has slowly come to appreciate the value of detailed record keeping and data collection. It may seem like a simple activity, but in practice it was not easy to adopt. A local official explains:

It was strange to us and strange to them [the workers]. Why do we want to know where they live? Why do we want to know how many children they have? If they are married, if they have a vehicle, if they have other jobs. What business is that of ours?

None of the unions have anything resembling a dedicated research department, and the organizers, many of whom come out of the rank and file, have no experience in interviewing strangers about their lives. It would be naive to consider detailed data collection an obvious part of union organizing, or to assume

that it is an easy task to take up. In India, the information and statistics deficit within the trade union movement is mirrored on the grand scale when one endeavors to search for reliable data from the government. However, gradually the practice of record keeping has become part of the organizing process and all the unions claim to have benefited from UNI's insistence on having more information at its disposal. As a UNI organizer in India declares, "I counted every single damn union card that came into that office. I know how many people are there. They know. They didn't like it, but now they know."

A CITU organizer agrees. "Before, we knew we had workers," he says. "Now, we know who they are. It's better that way."

However, except for a reluctant acceptance of record keeping, CITU's security guard union has largely ignored the advice of UNI on issues of strategy. However, when its local discussions with management occasionally break down, CITU has sought help further up the chain of command, relying on UNI's global social dialogue process and the company's works council to intervene, neither of which has proved effective. At other times it has used protests at worksites, strikes, and hunger strikes to draw attention to the poor conditions under which security guards labor.

While the UNI organizers were generally welcomed in Bangalore, unionists in Kolkata were far more hostile to the idea of outsiders in the movement. After four years of UNI's presence in India, interviews conducted for this project suggest that none of UNI's staff have fared well with CITU leaders. One local Indian organizer remarked as follows on his feelings about UNI's leadership in Kolkata: "They [UNI] sent us girls. Two girls. I am a good man, nothing wrong with girls. But this is a trade union of security guards. You see what I mean?" Perhaps this comment is evidence of a fundamental truism with regard to both the trade unions and the transnational corporations operating in India: they are both dominated, with fierce determination, by men.

In 2009, the union held a successful two-day stayaway to pressure G4S to pay pension fund contributions. Then, in April 2010, to force G4S to comply with a series of demands for job security, appointment letters, and back pay, CITU held simultaneous actions in Delhi and Kolkata, including a protest in front of the British Embassy, which employs G4S guards. These actions, though technically in breach of the global agreement, and organized apart from UNI, resulted in a favorable determination from G4S to distribute back pay, for wages dating as far back as three years earlier, to over 100 workers. CITU's governing ally had been a primary partner in these local actions and had worked to pressure many companies, not just G4S, to pay the minimum wage.

In 2010, CITU officials decided that CITU would no longer accept financial support from UNI, citing "ideological differences," and an official in Delhi suggested that CITU would soon reconsider its participation within ISWOI altogether. He said, "We cannot say for sure what good [ISWOI] has done us, and maybe we might be better without it."

Nationwide

To this day, management in India is out of compliance with the global agreement in that it represses any instance of trade union organizing activity. But the global agreement has been effective in other ways.

In early 2009, G4S lost two contracts with large players in the Hyderabad-based technology sector (IBM and WIPRO)—with rumors about a third in the Salt Lake Area outside Kolkata—after it was forced to pay higher wages and larger pension contributions. “Do you know how difficult it is to stay competitive in India?” asked a G4S representative. “Do you know how many businesses try to do our work better and cheaper than us?”

In light of these developments, where union employers are being punished in the market, UNI has shifted to a new approach. The social dialogue process between UNI and G4S has not given rise to union rights or organizing neutrality as it has elsewhere. However, after a year of lobbying the state, with the company’s support, it has nearly won nationwide legislation that could raise standards for security guards across the industry, effectively extending aspects of the global agreement into India’s political arena.

Such legislation will undoubtedly require vigilance on the part of unions to implement it where it does not happen automatically. And given the fierce opposition of most of the industry and the pathetically low levels of unionization, it is unlikely to be implemented easily or immediately. Regardless of this, the legislation sets an important legal and political precedent for workers in the informal sector. The prospect of such a law was nearly crushed when UNI essentially abandoned its campaigns in India in late 2010 as a result of bureaucratic and financial difficulties. Indian law briefly prohibited UNI from funding its affiliate unions, causing it to remove its full-time staff person who was responsible for running the ISWOI coalition. However, UNI has once again been able to move its resources and staff in and out of the country freely, and is trying to resume the campaign where it left off.

VARIETIES OF LABOR TRANSNATIONALISM

Why have the CITU and INTUC unions used the global agreement differently? I find that the unions’ divergent approaches—and varied successes—are based on (1) global-local union relationships, (2) traditions of state patronage, and (3) the legacies of labor internationalism and union imperialism.

Probably the most significant factor that determines the extent to which a global agreement is implemented is the relationship between the global union federation and the affiliate union or union group: the global and the local. We can clearly understand the desperate need for “bridge builders” to span the global-local divide when we examine the Indian case. Although the importance of such activists has featured strongly in accounts of labor-community coalitions

(Brecher & Costello, 1990; Nissen, 2002; Tait, 2008), rarely have they been seen as crucial to global campaigns. Local unionists in Bangalore were far more receptive to UNI's message and its staffers than local unionists in Kolkata for a number of reasons.

There is a strong UNI culture in Bangalore, absent from Kolkata, that exerts influence through the UNIDOC office. Though the PSGU has its own office, it holds most of its general meetings at the UNIDOC headquarters in Vasantanagar, in a spacious, clean office with a large meeting room decorated with photographs from UNI's various global solidarity actions. UNIDOC houses multiple unions, each conspicuously named "UNI" plus its corresponding trade name: UNITES (IT-Enabled Services), UNICOM (Tele-Communications), UNIFIN (Financial Services), and so on. UNI has positioned itself as the primary organizing body not only for workers in the vast informal economy, but also in the fast-growing services sector in Bangalore and Hyderabad. If there is a union in India with its finger on the political-economic pulse of the country's future, it is UNI.

Though the UNIDOC structure emphasizes industrial unionism, its constituent unions in the technology-related industries organize young workers by catering to a privileged class of professionals on the basis of status, income, and knowledge-based labor. These workers, UNIDOC staffers say, are of a new era, and do not identify with the public sector unions that have dominated the landscape throughout Bangalore's history. One might say the new workforce is presumed to have a different habitus than the average Indian union member, which inclines him or her to reject trade unions in favor of elite associations. UNITES, for example, the only union to materialize so far in the Indian IT industry, claims 20,000 members, and makes recruitment appeals almost solely through an on-line portal that describes the organization as a powerful NGO.

Though talk of "organizing unionism" is widespread, its actual realization has been stymied by the continuation of the old ways of business unionism, even cronyism. The UNIDOC unions also have a different relationship with employers. There is no global agreement to be implemented, there is no official UNI mentorship program for organizers, and they tend to avoid, whenever possible, direct confrontations with management. UNIDOC therefore fosters a collective identification with a common cause and global partner, though not necessarily a shared methodology. Nonetheless, UNI enjoys a positive reception within UNIDOC that is crucial to its success.

By contrast, CITU staffers report significant dissatisfaction with the UNI campaign. A CITU leader in Kolkata waves his hand dismissively at the air at the mention of UNI, as if batting away a fly. He also expresses a sense of hopelessness about the ISWOI coalition. Though he clearly states CITU's deep desire for labor movement unity, he doubts that INTUC shares his commitment to nonpartisanship, and therefore thinks ISWOI is more a UNI-directed front group than a legitimate, heterogeneous Indian organization. He raised his hands

and moved his fingers so as to suggest the movements of a puppeteer bringing life to a marionette.

This leader says membership growth has been no different since the collaboration started. But he is more troubled by the fact that CITU and the Indian unions seem to be under the influence, and direction, of UNI and SEIU. "We are not sure what good this has done," says another staffer at CITU. "We have to ask this question: 'Right now, why would workers join this union?' I have no idea," he says.

Second, the historical patterns of labor mobilization are embedded in the divergent political contexts of the two city-states of Bangalore and Kolkata. CITU's close connections to the reigning CPI[M] meant that for over 30 years the union faced little resistance from the state, and attracted members based on their political affiliations more than for any other reason. This situation led to a lack of incentive to develop a coherent organizing program for growth, since the state's role in mediating disputes and guaranteeing wages and conditions was so dominant.

In Karnataka, by contrast, although the INTUC unions grew alongside the Congress Party and enjoyed success in its state-run enterprises, the party has never held the same degree of control over the local political economy. In fact, the political history of Karnataka is opposite to that of West Bengal, as competing parties have for decades won alternating elections. As Patrick Heller (2000) describes for Kerala, this situation impresses upon parties the need to fight for local allegiances, creating a more active political climate. This has meant that unions in Bangalore have matured as less dependent on party-state alliances than elsewhere. Moreover, comparably rapid de-industrialization, the dramatic rise of services, and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) recent electoral victories in the Lok Sabha have forced the unions into a new quest for relevancy. Though union density fell as it did elsewhere, the circumstances listed above nonetheless seem to have sounded an important alarm for workers in Bangalore, where the old state-sector unions are organizing again and the new autonomous unions have found a significant reception among workers in the construction and telephone industries.

Finally, different historical experiences with transnational labor cooperation have affected the way unions in each place relate to UNI, and therefore the extent to which the global agreement has had currency. European trade unions have works council structures to help coordinate union actions and share information, even if they are sometimes dominated by management interests. Likewise, Latin American trade unions benefit from their involvement in regional politics through MERCOSUR, and even African unions have, at times, taken advantage of bodies like the Southern African Development Community to coordinate regional activity. India lacks such integration into an Asian bloc or trade union association (Kuruvilla et al., 2002). CITU unionists were also at the forefront of the movement that successfully opposed a social clause in global

trade agreements and World Trade Organization (WTO) rules, preferring to bank on the comparative advantage of poor workers in attracting jobs, rather than to raise standards everywhere. Indian trade unionism has therefore remained largely isolated and isolationist, despite the country's status as an emerging power in the global economy.

Despite this legacy, higher levels of direct foreign investment in Bangalore have meant that workers there, especially in major growth industries, have recently been brought into contact with campaigns led by unions outside the country. Such is the case in the construction, telecommunications, security, contract cleaning, and chemical industries. By contrast, Kolkata, as the erstwhile capital of the British Empire in India, was on the receiving end of much imperialistic union activism from the UK. This has impacted the perception of international collaboration with local unions to this day. A CITU leader spoke to his relationship with UNI staff:

They [UNI] don't understand us. It's as simple as that. To work with people, you have to understand what they do, how they operate, what they are like. They know us only as workers, not as people. We have our way, and it is not theirs, and they are pressurizing us to change. Okay, so that is their job. But we do our job and we do not do it like they want always. So, you can say we are not in agreement at all times. It has always been like that for Indians and Europeans, you know this, right? Read, ask people, you will see.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that Indian unions collaborated with UNI in varied ways to win and implement the global agreement. I focused first on the unique context of Indian industrial relations—involuted pluralism, deeply politicized unions, massive informalization—and then moved on to discuss how this context shaped the campaign strategy. The main strategic response to this situation was to attempt to overcome the deep political chasms between unions within India by building the ISWOI coalition. Imperfect and fragile, it has nonetheless acted as a reasonable framework within a country that has rarely seen sustained cross-federation union collaboration.

Regarding the implementation of the global agreement, ISWOI achieved partial success by bringing the employer (G4S) into compliance with national law (the Contract Labour Act), which required that it pay higher (legal) minimum wages and pension fund contributions. Unlike the situation in South Africa, for example, where the global agreement constrained management's antiunion behavior (McCallum, 2011), local G4S leaders were not asked by the UK-based leadership to act in accordance with the agreement. This fact encouraged a different tactical maneuver by UNI. ISWOI was forced to redirect its claims away from management and toward the state. The result, which was the outcome of a cumbersome yet ultimately productive social dialogue process with

management, has been the establishment of new legislation to raise standards for five million security guards in the country, in terms of higher pension fund contributions, wage increases, and mandated ID cards.

This demonstrates that the global agreement, on the surface a simple labor contract, can be used by unions to win different kinds of gains. In this instance, the power of the global agreement turned out to be the fact that it generated a social dialogue process. As one UNI organizer put it, "Now we have a place to solve problems. Without that space, none of this would have happened."

In the Indian case, we see that the influence of local bridge builders was also critical. In Bangalore, local organizers credit UNI's staff with helping to develop a new kind of "scientific" unionism, whereas in Kolkata, UNI was marginalized based on perceived cultural divisions and political incompatibilities. These differences help to explain why the global agreement received a different amount of attention in each city and why it was more thoroughly implemented in Bangalore than in Kolkata. Other reasons for the differential attention and implementation include the relationships between unions and the state and the legacies of past labor imperialism.

However, the challenges facing the Indian unions are still great. Massive employer repression has held much constructive organizing at bay, and the unions in both cities remain loose formations, with rotating and fluctuating membership. UNI's recent exit from India, based on "resource issues," raises obvious questions about the sustainability of the ISWOI coalition without local UNI staff to monitor it. Therefore, we can conclude that the UNI-ISWOI collaboration represents an important step forward in the Indian labor movements, which has heretofore had very limited experience with transnational collaboration. However, it remains to be seen whether or not it has helped to develop a strong enough local structure to sustain a lengthy campaign against the largest multinational company in the country.

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