

**SOLIDARITY SOMETIMES: GLOBALIZATION, TRANSNATIONALISM,  
AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Solidarity Sometimes: Globalization, Transnationalism, and the Labor Movement**

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This dissertation investigates the role of global labor in international relations. I argue that global labor is mainly comprised of two parts: national union organizations and Global Unions. Global Unions are transnational labor organizations (TLOs) with a worldwide membership that were created by national union organizations to represent their interests internationally. I contend that Global Unions perform five interrelated functions for national unions. However, due to the inherent structural weaknesses of Global Unions, it is the national unions that, in fact, remain the critical force behind global labor. Therefore, I focus on the transnational activities of national unions. I identify three conditions that result in incentives for unions to choose strategies of labor transnationalism: the shrinking of national political opportunity structures, the increasing availability of international political opportunity structures, and the adoption of a social union or social movement unionism paradigm for union revitalization. Additionally, I identify three factors that inhibit labor transnationalism among national unions: diminishing resources, turf wars, and cultural barriers. I introduce the concept of complex labor transnationalism as an alternative approach to the more limited traditional practice of labor transnationalism. I disaggregate the activities associated with complex labor transnationalism into six types: communicative transnationalism, political

transnationalism, steward transnationalism, protest transnationalism, collaborative transnationalism, and steward transnationalism. Furthermore, I conduct a case study on the state of labor transnationalism in the United States concluding that while most unions take a traditional approach towards labor transnationalism there is some evidence of complex labor transnationalism. Finally, I draw several conclusions about the role of global labor in international relations and outline three areas of potential growth.

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Although my parents, Gerald and Carol Rothermel, might not have fully understood what it was their son was working on for so many years, their self-sacrifice and hard work while raising four boys set an example for me that made it possible to pursue my goals and be the man that I have become. I owe them an incredible debt of gratitude. The bond of brotherhood is unbreakable in my family, and I always know that I can depend on my brothers, Matt, Tim, and Michael – “4R forever.” I would also like to thank Eldon and Doreen Sunderland for their love, patience, and support while I completed my dissertation.

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Pennsylvania, particularly Dr. Jeffrey Bosworth, for taking a chance on an aspiring university professor and providing me with critical institutional and professional support.

To Sheri Sunderland – my best friend and soul mate.

## PREFACE

My personal experience organizing graduate employees at Temple University was the impetus for this dissertation. The fight for unionization of graduate employees began in 1997 and ended on April 18, 2002, after the Temple University Graduate Students' Association (TUGSA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Local 6290, ratified its first contract (287-2). I was elected as TUGSA's first co-president. My experience at the local level and my interest in international relations prompted me to investigate the role of organized labor at the global level.

My quest for a greater understanding of global labor was supported by many. I would like to thank the numerous union officials, labor activists, and labor scholars who gave their valuable time to speak with me. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to study abroad as a doctoral fellow at the Hans Böckler Foundation's Institute of Social and Economic Research (WSI), located in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 2004-2005. The Foundation's financial, institutional, and travel support was invaluable to my research. Just as important, my personal connections to working class people was a constant reminder that workers – like my father who has worked in the same automotive parts factory for almost 40 years – are ultimately the backbone of the international labor movement. Despite the fact that most rank-and-file unionists are likely unaware of Global Unions, it is an inescapable truth that without these workers unions would cease to exist and efforts to improve working conditions throughout the world would not be possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### KNOCKING ON GLOBAL LABOR'S DOOR

“What we have today won't get the job done. We need to build a new trade union internationalism” – Guy Ryder, ITUC General Secretary (2006)

#### Introduction

The world needs global unions, according to many union leaders, but where are they? Unions are important domestic actors in civil society, but they have struggled to significantly increase their influence beyond the nation-state. In fact, unions have become a target for those who believe that they are a hindrance to the flexibility and competitiveness of national economies that are increasingly functioning on a global scale. Ironically, unions have a long and rich history of internationalism. John Logue (1980) characterizes them as “champions of internationalism.” Thus, one would expect unions to thrive under globalization as contacts among workers worldwide increase and barriers between states diminish, but so far the need for global unions has largely been unfulfilled. “Workers of the World, Now What?” was a question posed by a *Foreign Policy* article in 1999. The author reported, “There is an empty seat at the banquet of economic globalization. While international capital, trade, and business feast on open markets, heightened efficiency, and vanishing barriers in the new global marketplace, labor is nowhere to be found” (Newland 1999, 52). This dissertation addresses the questions: who represents workers in today's global economy? And does global labor matter?

Already in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, transnational labor cooperation was considered an essential element of the nascent labor movements. Transnational labor organizations (TLOs), which endure to this day, were created by unions to embody the international

labor movement. Despite the forethought of those early unions, the contemporary international labor movement has not evolved into a formidable actor on the global stage. In fact, most TLOs remain anonymous to the workers whom they claim to represent worldwide. Ironically, the maturation of capitalism, which Karl Marx predicted would hasten proletariat revolutions, has come to be associated with the decline of organized labor. For example, the often written about conflict between the Global North and Global South illustrates how capitalism tends to lead to conflict rather than cooperation among workers internationally. Global labor has been slow to evolve as a counterweight to global capital, and as a result, the relevancy of global labor is questioned.

In order to find out whether global labor matters, my dissertation focuses on several questions. First, what is global labor? This introductory chapter will identify the principal actors of global labor. These actors primarily include national union organizations and Global Unions. Global Unions refer to TLOs with a worldwide membership of national union affiliates. I argue that Global Unions are agents of national unions and ultimately, the future of global labor depends on the critical support and political will of national unions. Next, I define labor transnationalism and identify two approaches to labor transnationalism taken by unions: traditional labor transnationalism and complex labor transnationalism. Finally, I argue that global labor should be studied in the context of the transnational actor literature of international relations.

Second, what can be learned from the history of global labor? In Chapter 2, I present a brief historical overview of the international labor movement by studying the TLOs that have been created by national union organizations over the past hundred years.

Characteristically, international labor solidarity has been elusive, and the history of the international labor movement reveals stark differences among unions throughout the world reminding us that global labor is not a monolithic actor. Unions are diverse political actors that often disagree with one another due to relative differences within their respective national environments that shape their goals and priorities, and international labor solidarity cannot be taken for granted.

Third, what purpose do Global Unions serve for their national affiliates, and how do they act to influence outcomes in the global political economy? My research primarily focuses on Global Union Federations (GUFs), formerly known as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Collectively, they have been branded as Global Unions. The fact that thousands of unions worldwide maintain affiliations to Global Unions is evidence of the value of these organizations. Relying on interviews with several officials from the Global Unions, I identify five important functions of Global Unions. I conclude that Global Unions provide a valuable framework to express the interests of global labor, but they are generally weak and under-utilized by their affiliates.

Fourth, if national unions are the key to global labor, under what conditions do national unions pursue labor transnationalism? In Chapter 4, I argue that several conditions result in incentives for unions to choose strategies of labor transnationalism. These conditions include the shrinking of national political opportunity structures, the increasing availability of international political opportunity structures, and the adoption of a social union or social movement unionism paradigm for labor renewal strategies. Labor transnationalism is one strategy in a wide array of options for unions, and in most

cases, it is a strategy that will complement existing national priorities. However, the overall approach to labor transnationalism will vary among unions. Most unions engage in what I describe as traditional labor transnationalism, while others, especially those with greater incentives to “go global,” will explore ways to incorporate transnational activities in various areas of union governance. I describe this latter approach as complex labor transnationalism. Furthermore, I also identify several obstacles that continue to inhibit labor transnationalism among unions.

Fifth, what is the state of labor transnationalism in the United States labor movement? The U.S. economy is the largest and the most influential economy in the world. It is the largest source of foreign direct investment abroad as well as the largest recipient of foreign direct investment. Logically, unions in the United States should be a good indicator as to the prognosis of global labor. In Chapter 5, I argue that labor transnationalism in the United States has a mixed record. Using interviews with union officials, primary documents, and secondary sources, I survey three indicators of labor transnationalism to analyze how poised unions are to transition towards a global union model. My findings reveal that some unions are actively engaged in complex labor transnationalism, which I break down into several types of activities, but most unions take a traditional approach to labor transnationalism.

Finally, I return to the original question, does global labor matter? In Chapter 6, I make several conclusions about my research on global labor. First, global labor remains divided despite claims that it is more united than ever before. Second, global labor is invariably linked to the interests of powerful national unions because of its structural dependency on them. Third, while the incentives for national unions to “go global” are

increasing, this has not resulted in the transfer of greater competencies to Global Unions. Fourth, rank-and-file workers are largely an untapped resource of global labor. Finally, global labor is an indispensable advocate for workers' rights internationally, but I do not believe it could ever evolve into a centralized and highly coordinated actor on the global stage. In addition, I identify three areas of potential growth for global labor.

The ability of unions to adapt to globalization is questioned by many who see unions as “dinosaurs” or “victims” of globalization (Steingart 2008). They argue that global markets are isolating union strongholds; governments are abandoning unions; mobile capital is roaming the globe for cheap and unrestrictive labor markets; international financial institutions are cultivating neoliberal economic policies in the developing world; and unions are losing members. According to some, the efficacy of unions has been further reduced by the marginalization of unions in the international relations discipline. Daphne Josselin noted bluntly, “Trade unions have often been omitted from studies of international relations” (2001, 171). According to Robert O’Brien, labor issues were virtually “invisible” in major journals such as *International Organization*, and although the *Review of International Political Economy* was slightly better, he concluded, “...the study of labor is on the fringe of the discipline of IPE” (2000a, 91). However, in recent years, there has been resurgence in the literature on unions. Unions are resilient organizations, and although they face difficult times, many unions are adapting. Robin Cohen concluded, “On closer examination, it seems that the obituaries for labor protest and its struggles for social justice have been posted prematurely” (2002, 216). This dissertation analyzes the current state of global labor and

assesses whether or not it has the fortitude to take its “seat at the economic banquet of globalization.”

### **What is Global Labor?**

The answer to this question is complex, because the international labor movement is comprised of a multitude of union organizations, and no single organization can speak authoritatively for global labor. If global labor were organized as a hierarchy, the ITUC would be the peak “international” organization, representing over 168 million workers from 305 affiliates in 153 countries and territories.<sup>1</sup> But global labor is not vertically organized because the sanctity of national affiliates’ autonomy is ensured in the constitution of the ITUC. The goals of the ITUC are typically decided based on consensus among a diverse membership that often results in agreement to the lowest common denominator. Furthermore, the legitimacy of the ITUC as the preeminent organization for global labor is undermined by the fact that most rank-and-file unionists do not even realize that it exists. Instead, global labor, as best as it can be defined, is comprised mainly of two main parts: national union organizations and Global Unions.

National union organizations include both national unions and national union federations. National unions (including their respective sub-units) are the collective bargaining agents for workers and represent their interests while negotiating the terms and conditions of their employment. Their members are dues-paying workers. Examples include IG Metall in Germany and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the United States. National union federations, on the other hand, are umbrella organizations that represent the interests of workers more broadly and whose membership consists of

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<sup>1</sup> A list of the ITUC’s affiliates can be accessed on their web site: <http://www.ituc-csi.org/>.

national unions. Examples include the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the United Kingdom and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in the United States.

By definition, TLOs are organizations of national union organizations from more than two countries. Global Unions are examples of TLOs that have a worldwide membership. They were established by national unions to represent their interests at the international level. Global Unions can be divided into two types of TLOs. First, there are organizations whose membership is comprised primarily of national union federations. In November 2006, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labor (WCL) merged to form the ITUC. The ITUC is the largest and most representative example of this type of TLO, but the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are also examples. The second type of TLO is generally organized according to economic and/or industrial sectors and its members are national unions. Global Union Federations (GUFs) are the most common examples of this type.<sup>2</sup> Examples of GUFs include the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) and the Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) (see *Table 1*). Generally, the ITUC and the TUAC focus more broadly on labor issues, while GUFs deal more specifically with multinational corporations and industry standards such as a health and safety.

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<sup>2</sup> European Industry Federations (EIFs) are also examples of this type of transnational labor organization.

**Table 1: Global Unions**

<b>GLOBAL UNION</b>	<b>INDUSTRY</b>	<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>	<b>SECRETARIAT</b>
Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI)*	Construction industry, timber industry, forestry and allied sectors	About 12 million workers from 319 trade unions in 130 countries	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 2005)
Education International (EI)	Educators, teachers, lecturers and other employees in education	Nearly 30 million workers from 401 affiliated organizations in 172 countries	Brussels, Belgium (est. 1993)
International Arts and Entertainment Alliance (IAEA)	Arts and entertainment industries	Comprised of International Federation of Actors (FIA), International Federation of Musicians (FIM), and UNI-MEI, the media and entertainment section of Union Network International	London, United Kingdom

International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Union (ICEM)	Energy, electricity, chemical industries, rubber, plastic, diamonds, gems, ornaments, jewellery, ceramics, paper and cellulose, glass, cement, environmental protection industries, coal mining, mineral mining, stone and sand production	More than 20 million workers from 467 trade unions in 132 countries	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 1995)
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)	Print media, broadcasting, film and television, news agencies and new electronic media. Members must be full-time journalists	About 600,000 workers in more than 100 countries	Brussels, Belgium (est. 1952)
International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF)	Automobile, aviation and aerospace, electrical engineering and electronics, mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, iron and steel, non-ferrous metals as well as metal-processing	Over 200 affiliates in 100 countries with a total membership of 25 million	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 1904)
International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF)	Textile, garment and leather sector	217 affiliates in 110 countries with a total membership of over 10 million	Brussels, Belgium (est. 1960)

International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)	Transport industry	654 affiliates in 148 countries with a total membership of about 4.5 million workers	London, UK (est. 1896)
International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF)	Food and drink sector, hotel, restaurant, catering and tourism services, agriculture and plantation farming and tobacco processing	336 affiliates in 120 countries with a total membership of over 12 million	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 1920)
Public Services International (PSI)	Public administration, enterprises and institutions of regional authorities, public institutions, administrations and companies delivering public services, employees in institutions created by states or communities of states	Over 600 affiliates in more than 140 countries with a total membership of 20 million	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 1907)
Union Network International (UNI)	Communications, graphics, media and entertainment, clerical, professional and technical employees	20 million workers from 900 affiliates	Geneva, Switzerland (est. 2000)
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)	National trade union centers	311 affiliates representing about 168 million workers from 155 countries and territories	Brussels, Belgium (est. 2006)

Trade Union Advisory Council (TUAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	National trade union centers of OECD members	66 million workers from 58 national trade union centers from 30 OECD countries	Paris, France (est. 1962)
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Source: ICFTU (2004a) *A Trade Union Guide to Globalization* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) and updated membership compiled through a survey of Global Unions' websites on July 29, 2009.

\*At its World Congress in December 2005, the IFBWW merged with the World Federation of Building and Wood Workers creating the newly established Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI).

There are three reasons why I argue that national unions are the driving force behind global labor. First, national unions provide the bulk of financial support for Global Unions through membership affiliation dues. Without the financial backing of national unions, Global Unions would cease to function. Second, national unions are the gate-keepers to the rank-and-file. Global Unions are constitutionally required to recognize the autonomy of their national union affiliates and protocol dictates that Global Unions generally do not deal directly with rank-and-file members. Third, although Global Unions maintain small secretariats headed by a general-secretary, the political leadership of the Global Unions is elected from among national union delegates, who are primarily national union officers who serve in dual leadership roles. In effect, Global Unions serve as agents of national unions. Thus, even in a globalizing world, national unions continue to be the fundamental unit of global labor.

## Crisis of Membership

Unions throughout the world are currently facing a “crisis of membership.” Quite simply, the percentage of workers who are organized in national labor markets has generally declined, with a few exceptions. The crisis of membership is a serious concern among unions because the strength and vitality of unions ultimately rests with their dues-paying membership. In 1997, the International Labor Organization (ILO) issued a comprehensive report on union membership. About half of the countries surveyed had seen “a considerable drop in their membership in absolute figures over the last ten years,” while only about 20 countries increased their overall figures (ILO 1997, 6). To put it in more perspective, when applied to broader employment trends, the unionization rate “has fallen by more than 20 percent in 35 of the 66 countries for which comparison was possible” (ILO 1997, 7). In a survey of union statistics of 24 OECD countries, Jelle Visser (2006) reported that 20 of 24 countries registered declining union density rates from 1970 to 2002. A more recent analysis of OECD data on unionization rates showed that of 25 OECD countries where data was available, the rates of union density declined from 2003-2006 for 23 countries (OECD 2009). A survey of union density among European Union countries found that between 1993-2003 – of the twenty countries for which data was available, all but one (Malta) experienced decline (EIRO 2004).

The decline in union density is particularly noticeable in industrialized countries. In the United States, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 12.4 percent of workers were unionized in 2008 compared to 20.1 percent in 1983 (BLS 2009). Membership in the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) has declined steadily from about 12 million members in 1991 to about 6.6 million in 2006 (Dribbusch and Schulten 2008). In

Japan, only 18.7 percent of workers belonged to a union in 2005 compared to over 35 percent in 1970 (Shuto and Urata 2008). Additionally, unions in the Global South have suffered as well. The unionization rates declined in Kenya from 41.9 percent in 1985 to 16.9 percent in 1995; in Argentina from 48.7 percent in 1986 to 25.4 percent in 1995; and in Singapore from 26.8 percent in 1980 to 15.6 percent in 1995 (Phelan 2007, 23).

The crisis of membership has caused a lot of internal debate among unions and has been seen by some as an opportunity to re-evaluate their strategies. In the context of global labor, unions are acknowledging that the problem of organizing is endemic to the international labor movement, and thus requires a coordinated response. For example, on February 9, 2006, over 500 unionists, labor academics, and NGO activists met in New York City for the “Global Companies-Global Unions-Global Research-Global Campaigns” conference. The goal of the conference was “to strengthen labor’s capacity to conduct more effective strategic corporate research and run more effective comprehensive cross-border campaigns against the world’s largest transnational firms” (Bronfenbrenner 2007, 1). On December 10-11, 2007, the AFL-CIO hosted the “Going Global: Organizing, Recognition and Union Rights” conference sponsored by the Council of Global Unions where over 200 union leaders from 63 countries gathered to discuss global strategies to organize workers (Parks 2007b). While some unions are likely to respond defensively to the crisis of membership (e.g. supporting trade protectionism), events such as these are evidence that transnational labor strategies are being shared by unions to address a common concern. In recent years, the literature on union revitalization has focused largely on the crisis of membership and global labor is a

potential beneficiary of union renewal strategies. Therefore, it is important to assess the extent to which unions are following up their global rhetoric with global action.

### **Traditional versus Complex Labor Transnationalism**

I define labor transnationalism as the transnational activities of union members and their organizations. Such activities can include promoting universal workers' rights, organizing workers across the world, establishing informal or formal links with unions and/or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) abroad, and engaging in transnational campaigns. I prefer the term labor transnationalism over labor internationalism for a couple of reasons. First, labor internationalism has a connotation that is universal in nature. Most international activities of unions are targeted and limited in scope, and internationalism implies a harmony of interests within the international union movement that is historically not the case. Second, labor internationalism is a term that traces its roots to the international political system of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often associated with the First and Second Internationals (Lorwin 1929), which was much more state centric than it is today, and labor transnationalism reflects the increased interaction among non-state entities.

Unions are multi-faceted organizations that concurrently pursue economic, social, and political goals for their members. As such, strategies of labor transnationalism will vary depending on the goal unions are trying to achieve. I argue that unions' approach to labor transnationalism can be characterized into two broad categories: traditional labor transnationalism and complex labor transnationalism. Unions that take a traditional approach to labor transnationalism will offer lip service to international labor solidarity,

but for the most part, are not interested in substantive involvement in transnational labor cooperation. Traditional labor transnationalism tends to be associated with junkets, mainly for the benefit of the union elite. At a minimum, it includes union participation in formal networks with unions abroad, usually through affiliations with Global Unions. From a rational perspective, some unions simply perceive the costs of labor transnationalism to outweigh the benefits. The crisis of membership has forced unions to divert more resources to organizing efforts at home, and labor transnationalism is not a significant priority for many unions. Logue explained, “Increased trade union power nationally has made international activities increasingly marginal to the needs of the membership” (1980, 49).

On the other hand, the dichotomous relationship between domestic and international affairs is becoming blurred for some unions. Increasingly, unions are responding to changes in the workplace and the work force brought about by globalization. Complex labor transnationalism is an approach taken by unions that are actively adapting to globalization by incorporating transnational activities into various areas of union governance such as collective bargaining, politics, health and safety, education, and organizing. Incentives for more substantive labor transnationalism are encouraging unions to look beyond their borders. Unions are either “pushed or pulled” (Burgoon and Jacoby 2004) towards labor transnationalism as a result of changes taking place at both the national and international levels. In addition, some unions are making strategic choices to utilize labor transnationalism as a strategy to revitalize their organizations and to proactively shape their role in the global economy.

In Chapter 5, I disaggregate the activities of complex labor transnationalism into six types: communicative transnationalism, political transnationalism, steward transnationalism, protest transnationalism, collaborative transnationalism, and institutional transnationalism. Complex labor transnationalism reflects the strategic choices available to unions to pursue their goals. In addition, it underscores the fact that labor transnationalism should not be understood as a goal of unions but rather as a means to increase the effectiveness and relevancy of unions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Unions are just one of many transnational actors that forge transnational networks and strategies to pursue their goals.

### **Global Labor as Transnational Actors**

Research on global labor is best understood within the context of the literature on transnational actors, often referred to as non-state actors. However, traditionally, unions have not been the central focus of this literature. Part of this can be explained by three developments. First, the early literature on transnational actors during the 1970s mainly focused on the rise of multinational corporations. Unions did not have the same capacity as MNCs to operate at the transnational level because MNCs – and unions – resisted multinational collective bargaining (Northrup and Rowan 1979). In addition, to the extent that organized labor was viewed as a transnational actor, it tended to be treated as an instrument of the national government. For example, Robert W. Cox characterized the AFL-CIO as a “soldier of American capitalism abroad” in support of US hegemony (1977, 397). The neglect of organized labor in the newly created field of international

political economy reinforced the peripheral role of organized labor as a transnational actor (O'Brien 2000a).

Second, during the 1990s, the literature on transnational actors shifted primarily to international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and transnational advocacy networks, but organized labor was generally not included in this research. Part of this exclusion can be attributed to organized labor's insistence that unions were "distinct" from INGOs. However, the lack of interest in organized labor, according to Jeffrey Harrod and Robert O'Brien, was also connected to its perception as a "spent social force" that "lacks modernity" due to its inflexible structure (2002, 15). For example, organized labor was conspicuously absent from Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) seminal work on transnational advocacy networks.

Third, the globalization literature marginalized the role of unions as transnational actors arguing that organized labor's inability to adapt to flexible and competitive global markets made them increasingly irrelevant. Globalization proponents predicted that there would be a convergence of national economies, as neoliberal economic policies were adopted by governments throughout the world. According to globalists, economic liberalism has come to dominate the new world order (Fukuyama 1992). In this world, the role of the state is substantially weakened if not increasingly irrelevant (Ohmae 1995). The "flattening" of the world opens up international labor markets (Friedman 2005). Thus, unions are increasingly competing with union and non-union workers from all over the world, which puts them at a distinct disadvantage when dealing with multinational employers. Overall, Axel Dreher and Noel Gaston (2005) argued that the social effect of globalization on unions has been harmful, particularly in developed

countries. In sum, the rise of globalization has come to be associated with the decline of unions.

The net result of these trends has been a gap in the literature on transnational actors when it comes to global labor. However, there are several reasons why this oversight should be corrected. First, global labor has a long history of transnationalism that dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the formation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864 was an attempt to forge bonds among workers that transcended the state. Dimitris Stevis cites the First International as an example of a transsocietal organization, which he describes as "organizations that allow direct membership by individuals or groups" (1998, 54). Second, global labor has an organizational presence that is worldwide. National unions are present in virtually every country, and a multitude of transnational labor organizations, including Global Unions, have been created to facilitate cooperation among unions. Finally, democratic principles play a prominent role in the mission of global labor (Gallin 2002). Global labor is an advocate for trade union rights, including the right to organize, and organized labor is viewed by many as a valuable actor in the development of civil society. This dissertation addresses the gap in the literature by focusing on global labor's role as a transnational actor. However, a brief overview of the literature on transnational actors is necessary to provide a context for situating global labor within the literature.

In international relations theory, realism has dominated the discourse since the end of World War II. Realism asserts the state-centric view of international relations and non-state actors, including unions, are largely ignored (Morgenthau 1948). Power politics and security issues were regarded as the driving forces behind international

relations (Waltz 1979). However, the growth of multinational corporations and intergovernmental organizations, such as the European Economic Community, could not be ignored. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (1971) argued that an alternative “world politics paradigm” was needed to account for the increasing number of transnational actors that sometimes prevailed over states. By focusing on transnational interactions, Keohane and Nye acknowledged the potential importance of transnational actors. In a later work, Keohane and Nye (1977) introduced the concept of complex interdependence to argue that there were multiple transnational exchanges between states that could lead to greater cooperation. Although the emerging neoliberal critique of realism shared many of its assumptions about the importance of the states and the relative distribution of power, the focus on transnational relations gave rise to alternative approaches to studying international relations, including constructivism (Wendt 1999).

By expanding the theoretical debate to include “transnational relations”, the domestic structures of states were increasingly included in the study of international relations. Several scholars turned to the domestic level to explain international outcomes. For example, Peter Katzenstein (1978) explored the relationship between domestic structures and the state to explain differences in the foreign economic policies of advanced industrialized countries. Furthermore, Robert D. Putnam’s two-level game theory (1988) argued that liberal democracies engaged in simultaneous negotiations at the domestic and international levels when negotiating agreements with other countries. In fact, according to Putnam, domestic interests could be a source of negotiating leverage for states abroad. Later, Andrew Moravcsik (1997) argued that domestic factors shape states’ preferences. However, these theories were still largely grounded in a state-centric

approach to international relations examining how domestic politics affected state behavior.

By the end of the Cold War, debates in international relations theory had failed to adequately explain the effectiveness of transnational actors, while the increased number and activities of non-state actors were becoming more prominent. In 1990, James N. Rosenau argued that the ‘turbulence in world politics’ “is marked by a bifurcation in which the state-centric system now coexists with an equally powerful, though more decentralized, multi-centric system” (11). A renewed interest in transnational relations ensued. In *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In*, Thomas Risse-Kappen asked: “under what domestic and international circumstances do transnational coalitions and actors who attempt to change policy outcomes in a specific issue-area succeed or fail to achieve their goals” (1995, 5)? He argued that domestic and international structures of governance either facilitated or impeded the ability of transnational actors to achieve their policy goals. Thus, structure became an important variable for explaining the effectiveness of transnational actors.

Risse-Kappen’s argument paralleled similar arguments in the social movement theory literature. Sidney Tarrow defined a political opportunity structure as “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action” (1994, 18). Social movement theorists have relied on political opportunities for explaining, in part, the emergence and development of social movements (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). Keck and Sikkink (1998) also cited the availability of political opportunity structures in the success of transnational advocacy networks. They

argued that the combination of a closed national opportunity structure combined with an open international opportunity structure can result in a “boomerang effect.” Importantly, political opportunity structures can be found at both the national and international levels (Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002).

The availability of political opportunity structures are important variables in shaping the strategies of global labor. Earlier I mentioned that one of the reasons global labor has been neglected in the transnational actor literature was because convergence of national economies was rendering unions largely irrelevant. However, the literature on historical institutionalism refutes the claims of convergence among national economies and differentiates among varieties of capitalism (Hall and Soskice 2001). Peter A. Hall and David W. Soskice draw distinctions between liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs) that yield different outcomes in the behavior of firm strategies, including their relations with organized labor. They argue that unions in LMEs have weakened, while unions in CMEs have remained relatively strong. Kathleen Thelen argues that these differences “do not point toward convergence across industrial-relations systems, but rather, if anything, to a growing gap between LMEs and CMEs” (2001, 81). Therefore, political opportunity structures available to unions will vary. This suggests that unions will approach labor transnationalism differently depending on their national situations. Likewise, the presence of international opportunity structures encourages unions to consider transnational labor strategies, especially when national political opportunity structures are closed. Brian Burgoon and Wade Jacoby (2004) refer to this as the “push-pull” effect.

Another important dimension in the literature on transnational actors is the motivation of actors. Transnational actors are either motivated by instrumental goals or by normative goals (Risse 2002). According to rational choice theories, transnational actors that pursue the well-being of their organization and members are largely influenced by instrumental goals (Olson 1965). Within social movement theory, this is referred to as the theory of resource mobilization (Zald and McCarthy 1987). Alternatively, some transnational actors pursue normative goals that promote the common good (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Examples of these actors are typically found among INGOs focused on advocacy issues or among knowledge-based “epistemic communities.” Understanding the motivation of transnational actors can explain why actors pursue transnational strategies.

The fact that transnational actors can be motivated by different interests suggests that they have agency to pursue their goals regardless of structural constraints. In the context of organized labor, a growing strategic choice literature on union revitalization emphasizes the ability of unions to choose renewal strategies that can increase their overall effectiveness (Frege and Kelly 2004). This literature posits that “national context matters” but it is not “determinant” (Behrens, Hamann, and Hurd 2004). Innovative union strategies and experimentation can result in proactive responses to the challenges currently faced by unions. Labor transnationalism is one strategy that unions can pursue to help reinvigorate union decline (Frege and Kelly 2004; Phelan 2007).

However, for organized labor, the dichotomy between instrumental and normative goals is complicated by the multi-faceted nature of unions. Although unions perform an important economic function for their members (negotiating better terms and conditions

in the workplace), unions have also been important advocates of normative goals (such as ending apartheid, promoting universal healthcare, and addressing child labor). In fact, for some unions, the pursuit of normative goals can also have the effect of enhancing their instrumental goals. For example, unions that adopt a social union paradigm will focus on normative goals that serve the greater good of society, but the pursuit of such goals is intended to reinvigorate activism and legitimacy for unions, which also serves an instrumental goal. In addition, as mentioned previously, global labor is comprised predominantly of two parts: national union organizations and Global Unions. National unions are more likely to be held accountable to instrumental goals, while Global Unions, given their diffuse and diverse membership, will be freer to pursue normative goals.

In conclusion, the literature on transnational actors in international relations has largely overlooked the role of global labor. This is a puzzling omission considering that workers are the driving force behind the global economy. Poverty and economic inequality among workers persist – and in some cases – have risen. Workers’ rights, poverty, child labor, and sustainable development are issues that affect workers worldwide, and unions have worked collaboratively or in conjunction with INGOs, including United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), Clean Clothes Campaign, Sierra Club, and Oxfam, on these issues. In addition, global labor lends a voice to workers in the global economy by supporting the ILO, lobbying international financial institutions, and holding MNCs accountable to their workers.

Optimism for global labor is on the rise (O’Brien 2000b). The end of the Cold War brought down an ideological barrier that had divided global labor since the end of World War II (Ashwin 2000). Several labor scholars argue that “new” internationalism,

or global social movement unionism, is a promising form of transnationalism that returns unions to their activist roots. According to Ronaldo Munck, labor is undergoing a “great transformation” and he argues that “this new internationalism has moved beyond a conception of transnational collective bargaining, involving a more ‘social movement’ unionism” (2002, 154). Similarly, Kim Moody (1997) argues that “rank-and-file internationalism” based on transnational networks poses an alternative to “old internationalism.” Unions from the Global South are pivotal actors in the development of global social movement unionism (Lambert and Webster 2001). These trends suggest that global labor should be paid greater attention in the literature on transnational actors.

Studying global labor as transnational actors is the first step in answering the questions raised in this dissertation. However, to simply state that organized labor represents workers in today’s global economy falls to account for the complexities of the international labor movement. In fact, a holistic understanding of global labor is not possible without peeling back the numerous overlapping layers of organized labor that contribute to global labor in varying degrees. The future of global labor is dependent on its parts, and global labor will only matter to the extent in which its parts are willing and able to adapt to work with one another in support of their mutual goals. But as the following chapter demonstrates, this cannot be taken for granted.

**CHAPTER 2**  
**SOLIDARITY SOMETIMES: HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL**  
**LABOR MOVEMENT**

**Introduction**

Transnational labor organizations (TLOs) were created by unions as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a means to foster international labor solidarity. International labor solidarity was born out of the conviction that workers worldwide shared common interests. Union leaders envisioned TLOs as appropriate bodies to coordinate their efforts and facilitate the pursuit of their common interests across national boundaries. However, intervening variables, such as war and economic nationalism, have at various times throughout history compromised the idealistic vision of the international labor movement. An investigation into the history of the international labor movement reveals that international labor solidarity manifested in the international organizations created by unions to cooperate effectively with one another was an elusive goal. I argue that division rather than solidarity best characterizes the history of the international labor movement.

Unions do not necessarily share a harmony of interests that easily translates into transnational collective action. To imply that unions and TLOs that comprise global labor will naturally act in solidarity with one another fails to understand the diversity and complexity of the international labor movement. In this chapter, I offer a brief overview of the history of the international labor movement. I focus on a series of TLOs that were created by union elites to facilitate international labor solidarity. The historical record has shown that international labor solidarity was generally more of an illusion than a

reality. The lesson to be learned from this chapter is that global labor is a product of individual unions and TLOs that pursue interests that are not necessarily always compatible with one another. The history of the international labor movement highlights some of the internal challenges that are faced by global labor to act as an effective counterweight to global capital.

Furthermore, it is important to note that TLOs were generally created by union elites from the top down, and therefore, the average worker had little input into their development. Historically, the international labor movement, far from being a grassroots movement, has instead been a progression of competing institutions and union elite personalities. Although the capacity of contemporary workers to cooperate internationally has increased, the international labor movement remains aloof to the average worker. Part of the explanation for this stems from the fact that national unions purposely created TLOs that would be subordinate to their own political and economic goals, and they jealously guarded their autonomy at the cost of a more inclusive international labor movement led by TLOs. Rather than react organically to the challenges of globalization, organizational protocols that were created in the past restrict the ability of TLOs to be more effective global actors in the present.

This chapter is organized into chronological sections. The purpose of this historical overview is to show how the international labor movement was conceived and developed over the decades. I argue that some of the structural obstacles that inhibit the effectiveness of TLOs today can be traced back to the early days of the fledgling labor movement. I also provide numerous examples to show that cleavages among unions and TLOs prevented the development of a united international labor movement. Although

some of these cleavages have changed over time, significant divisions remain. Thus, to expect that global labor can effectively speak with a single voice fails to account for over one hundred years of history.

### **Nascent International Labor Movement**

Establishing contact with unions in other countries was a logical and necessary extension of union activities. There were practical economic reasons for cross-border communication and cooperation in the early years of national labor movements. First, importing foreign workers to break strikes was a common tactic used by employers. Contact between unions was intended to help curtail this practice. In 1863, a letter addressed “to the workmen of France from the working men of England,” appealed for solidarity:

A fraternity of peoples is highly necessary for the cause of labor, for we find whenever we attempt to better our social condition by reducing the hours of toil, or by raising the price of labor, our employers threaten us with bringing over Frenchmen, Germans, Belgians, and others to do our work at a reduced rate of wages... (quoted in van der Linden 2003, 17).

Second, skilled workers, or journeymen, regularly worked in foreign countries to hone their skills and seek employment. Of course, this was prior to the days of strict border controls. Logue argued that these journeymen “were in fact part of an international working class” (1980, 25). Agreements were made among early unions to mutually recognize each other’s members and confer benefits to them as they traveled across borders.

The political environment of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was also an important catalyst in facilitating early efforts of international solidarity. A radical, political left awakening,

which focused on economic class and conditions, was spreading throughout Europe and America. Rapid industrialization and urbanization helped to forge an identifiable economic class system, which many were quick to exploit. Unions became an important component of the political agendas advocated by socialists, syndicalists, and communists. The prose of writers - such as Karl Marx, Mikhail Bakunin, and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon - found receptive audiences who actively sought radical political and social changes. Already by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it was apparent that capitalism and its inherent expansionist logic would require an equivalent workers' response.

The founding of the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) took place on September 28, 1864. The impetus for the meeting was a personal response from the French working class to the English working class delivered in London. Later, Karl Marx, who was present at the founding meeting, wrote in the *Inaugural Address*:

Past experience has shown how disregard of that bond of brotherhood which ought to exist between the workmen of different countries, and incite them to stand firmly by each other in all their struggles for emancipation, will be chastised by the common discomfiture of their incoherent efforts. This thought prompted the working men of different countries assembled on September 28, 1864, in public meeting at St. Martin's Hall, to found the International Association (quoted in Tucker 1978, 518-519).

The First International, as it became known, was not a union organization per se, and the vision of working class unity was seen through many different lenses in this early attempt at international solidarity. Anarchists, communists, socialists, and unionists competed with one another for influence, and despite their best intentions, fissures within the First International resulted in its collapse by 1876 (Lorwin 1953).

Just over a decade later, the socialists had scored political gains in several European countries, and in most cases, they worked very closely with unions. A second

attempt at internationalism was initiated, and the Second International, which was composed of socialist parties and unions from several countries, was created in 1889. However, unions were secondary to the interests of political parties: “the economic and industrial aims of the unions, while acknowledged as important in their own right, were deemed to be subordinate to the party’s broader political and social efforts” (Windmuller 1980, 21). As the strength of unions increased independently of the political parties in matters of industrial relations, union leaders realized the utility of creating exclusively transnational labor organizations to meet their specific needs and interests.

The cross-border relationships that had been cultivated among union leaders in the First and Second Internationals proved to be fruitful in establishing several of the first International Trade Secretariats (ITSs). According to John P. Windmuller, ITSs “are the international associations of national trade unions representing workers in specific industries, industry groups, occupations, professions, or other sectors of employment such as public services” (2000, 102). Before the outbreak of World War I, there were about 30 ITSs representing a broad range of workers, including shoemakers, typographers, metalworkers, tobacco workers, and hatters (103).

National union centers, which were at the epicenter of their respective national labor movements, soon followed the lead of their national unions. National union centers such as the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) were labor organizations whose affiliate members were national unions. National union centers consolidated organized labor’s power by bringing together the union leaders of their affiliates and promoting the interests of organized workers within their respective countries. While many national union centers participated in the Second

International, they also realized that they had a stake in collectively promoting the unique interests of labor apart from political parties, and they began to establish regular meetings among themselves. Their first meeting was held in Copenhagen, Denmark on August 21, 1901. Soon thereafter, the International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centers (ISNTUC) was created to facilitate these regular contacts (Lorwin 1929, 100-102). At the turn of the century, both national unions and national union centers had established the first transnational labor organizations.

The roots of early labor internationalism were spawned by the radical political internationalism of the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The international labor movement was able to develop from the auspices of the First and Second Internationals. It was through these organizations that small groups of activists met at international conferences to promote the interests of the working class, irrespective of nationality. The international labor movement came into its own after the Second International when several ITSs and the ISNTUC were founded independently of the Second International, but their connection to political socialism was still an important part of the early international labor movement's identity. However, not all unions were comfortable with this association. Samuel Gompers, the leader of the AF of L, at first was wary to affiliate with the ISNTUC. The fact that the more radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the Federation of Trade Unions of Canada, which were rival organizations in America, sought membership helped to change his mind. After joining in 1910, the AF of L played an active role in changing the name of the ISNTUC to the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) in 1913 but resisted left-leaning policies (much to the

chagrin of many Europeans), such as the French Confederation of Labor's proposals on anti-militarism and the general strike (Lorwin 1953, 40-41).

Although the early international labor movement was a geographical misnomer, the creation of ITSs and the IFTU were important first steps for the nascent international labor movement in an ongoing fight for workers' rights that continues today. At the onset of World War I, the IFTU represented 7.5 million workers, mainly from Europe, through its 19 affiliated members, the most important ones being from Germany, the United States, Great Britain, France, and Austria (Windmuller 1980, 27). Based in Germany, the IFTU Secretariat had an impressive international staff of 12 full-time employees (van Goethem 2006, 17). However, despite these early efforts at labor internationalism, the autonomy of national unions was never in jeopardy, and in fact, it was often protected in the charters of the TLOs. The activities of TLOs were also limited in scope later prompting one Russian labor leader in 1925 to characterize the IFTU's predecessor, the ISNTUC, as nothing more than an "international post-box" (Dreyfus 2000, 70).

Ultimately, the greatest challenge for the fledgling international labor movement was maintaining solidarity in the face of impending geo-political conflict in 1914. Many labor leaders and socialists denounced the war as "universal imperialist aggression," and huge demonstrations were held in protest (Lorwin 1929, 139). Initially, there was hope that organized workers and socialists could avert war, but patriotic bonds to their governments proved to be too strong for them to overcome. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 resulted in the decisive triumph of nationalism over working class solidarity as unions divided into the alliances of their respective governments. Most international

union activities ceased during the war, and rather than fight a common enemy, the rank-and-file workers exchanged their work boots for combat boots and literally fought each other in the trenches of war.

### **IFTU and the Inter-War Years**

Following the war, union leaders in Europe quickly put back together the shattered pieces of the international labor movement. The Allied governments were motivated to appease unionists by the recent Russian Revolution, and labor issues were prominently featured in the peace talks leading to the Treaty of Versailles. Union leaders from Europe and the United States convened in Amsterdam in late July 1919. The tension among the delegates was palpable, particularly between the Belgians and Germans, but the delegates were successful in re-constituting the IFTU, which would later participate at the first International Labor Conference of the newly created International Labor Organization (ILO) held in Washington, D.C in October 1919. The new IFTU was based in Amsterdam and run by two general secretaries, the “reform-minded” Jan Oudegeest and the more “radical and revolutionary” Edo Fimmen, both from Holland (van Goethem 2006, 30).<sup>3</sup> The IFTU quickly established itself as the most representative and important TLO in the post war era, despite the fact that the AF of L opted not to affiliate. However, disunity and exclusion would characterize labor internationalism during the inter-war years.

Political internationalism after the war divided the working classes of Europe. The Russians took the initiative and founded the Third International or Communist International (Comintern) in 1919. The Russian communists assumed a hostile position

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<sup>3</sup> The IFTU is sometimes referred to the Amsterdam International.

towards socialists and non-communist unions, even rejecting an invitation to attend the 1919 union conference in Amsterdam, because they did not consider them genuine representatives of the working classes (Windmuller 1980, 31). Excluded by the communists, the socialists and unionists attempted to resurrect the Second International. Their efforts ultimately resulted in the Labor and Socialist International (LSI), which was founded in Hamburg in 1923. The LSI was an organization of labor and socialist political parties, but it had close ties to unions as well, particularly to the IFTU, which was acknowledged as the economic and industrial wing of the socialist movement (van Goethem 2006). Freed of the anti-socialist AF of L, the IFTU was a staunch supporter of the LSI and regularly worked with it.

The Comintern wasted no time in establishing a rival TLO, the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU), in 1921, and it was made clear from the start that the RILU and the IFTU would be antagonists. The president of the Comintern stated in 1920, “Amsterdam is the last stronghold of the bourgeois regime” (quoted in van Goethem 2006, 78). Additionally, the IFTU found itself confronted with yet another rival. In 1920, the International Federation of Christian Trade Unions (IFCTU) made its debut as the exclusive representative of national Christian unions primarily from Europe (Windmuller 1980). The relationship between the IFTU and the IFCTU was “most of the time unfriendly, if not hostile” (41). In fact, the IFTU defended its exclusivity as the representative agent of workers’ delegates of the ILO in an International Court of Justice case after the Dutch government appointed the general secretary of the IFCTU as its worker delegate to the annual International Labor Conference (van Goethem 2006, 143).

The fact that the IFTU lost the court case did nothing to assuage its relationship with the IFCTU throughout the inter-war years.

Most of the ITSs resumed their international labor activities following the war, and close working relationships were established with the IFTU. However, a hierarchy was recognized between the IFTU and the ITSs that would continue for decades to come. It was agreed that the IFTU would take the lead on more general economic and political issues relating to the international labor movement, while the ITSs would defer to the IFTU on these matters and concentrate on their specific trade or industry – e.g. health and safety issues, industry standards, etc. This understanding was codified at the IFTU Rome Congress in 1922 where ITSs were granted advisory status but not the right to vote and were expected to execute the decisions made by the IFTU (Price 1947, 146). This is not to say that there was never tension between the IFTU and ITSs. Edo Fimmen was an outspoken critic of the IFTU – the organization he served as general secretary from 1919 to 1923. As general secretary of the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), Fimmen argued that the IFTU was outdated and that the internationalization of capital required a more coordinated international response by organized labor, which could be best achieved through the ITSs (van Goethem 2006, 117).<sup>4</sup> The IFTU was unconvinced (as were many other ITSs). In the end, a proposal to grant the ITSs equal voting rights at the 1927 IFTU Congress was soundly defeated (van Goethem 2006, 119).

The IFTU was not immune to criticism and political infighting within its ranks throughout the inter-war years. Some national union centers began to question the high salaries and the bloated bureaucracy of the IFTU. By August 1923, the number of

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<sup>4</sup> Fimmen expressed his discord with the IFTU in a published essay, entitled “Labor’s Alternative: The United States of Europe or Europe Limited,” in 1924.

general secretaries had increased from two to four, and they enjoyed a staff of 48 full time employees (van Goethem 2006, 34). There were also contradictory messages sent by the IFTU leadership. For example, despite the IFTU's reluctance to deal with the Russian unions unless they would accept unconditional unity as part of the IFTU, A.A. Purcells, who was the president of the IFTU, established fraternal relationships with Russian unions in his other capacity as president of the British TUC, even going so far as to establish an Anglo-Russian Joint Advisory Council in February 1925 (94). After their short-lived affair with the Russians failed and their relationship with the IFTU became strained, the British sought reconciliation with the IFTU – but on British terms. The IFTU Secretariat was restructured by reducing its general secretaries to one, moving its Secretariat from Amsterdam to Berlin, and keeping the IFTU presidency in the hands of Britain (van Goethem 2006). Moving the Secretariat to Berlin and allowing the British to hold the IFTU presidency appeased the two largest and most important of the IFTU affiliates, but the move to Berlin would ultimately prove to be short-lived as the Nazis began their ascent to power.

Notably absent from the IFTU in the early years following World War I were the Americans. Although Gompers attended the Amsterdam conference in 1919, he did not commit to the IFTU. The AF of L leadership was turned off by the socialist rhetoric that pervaded the IFTU and Europe in general, especially since radical seeds had been sprouting within their own national movement. There were also concerns that the autonomy and independence of IFTU affiliates were not fully guaranteed in the constitution. Instead, the AF of L had turned its sights to its own hemisphere. In 1918, the Pan-American Federation of Labor (PAFL) had been created with affiliates from

North and South America (Lorwin 1953, 85-94). In effect, the AF of L had instituted its own version of the Monroe Doctrine, which strongly discouraged the IFTU from meddling in its regional labor affairs. But beginning in the 1930s, a mutual dependency would draw the IFTU and the AF of L back together. The loss of its German affiliates after the Nazis banned unions placed a greater financial burden on the IFTU, and the rise of yet another domestic rival, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) would once again motivate the AF of L to re-affiliate with the IFTU in 1937 (Sturmthal 1948).

The German unions were an important pillar of the international labor movement. The Germans provided the lion's share of the revenue at the international level by virtue of their active and large national labor movement. By 1931, Germany accounted for 4.5 million of the 13.7 million workers represented by the IFTU (Price 1947, 52-53). The IFTU had recently moved its Secretariat to Berlin and many ITSs had their headquarters in Germany. But the influence of the Germans came to an abrupt end when the newly empowered Nazis banned unions on May 2, 1933 (Lorwin 1953, 173). The spread of German Nazism caused alarm throughout the world. The IFTU's Secretariat was hastily moved to Paris, and the IFTU and many ITSs began to provide support to the "underground" German labor movement.

The years leading up to the outbreak of World War II would once again test the will and solidarity of the international labor movement. Although the IFTU succeeded in filling the membership void left by the Germans by increasing its non-European affiliates, including the AF of L, the threat of fascism dominated its agenda. For a time, the IFTU re-visited their position towards the Russian unions after the RILU was formally dissolved in February 1937. An IFTU delegation visited Moscow to discuss the

possibility of the communists joining the IFTU; however, the demands made by the Russians, including re-structuring the Secretariat into a triumvirate that would reserve a position of leadership for the Russians, were untenable to the British TUC and the AF of L (van Goethem 2006, 103).<sup>5</sup> The last congress of the IFTU was held in Zurich in 1939, and soon thereafter, the IFTU Secretariat was forced into exile from Paris to London. For the duration of the war, the Amsterdam International would spend its waning days in the care of the British TUC.

### **ICFTU and the Cold War**

Another world war would decimate the international labor movement, but even before the war ended, the British TUC took measures to rebuild it. The TUC established separate joint committees with the French, the Americans, and the Soviets during the war. Meanwhile, the Soviet All Union Central Council of Trade Unions (AUCCTU) and the American CIO, the growing rival of the AF of L, pressured the British to replace the IFTU with a new TLO, and the British finally relented in part by initiating plans to convene a world union congress, which the AF of L promptly refused to participate in. The AF of L argued that the IFTU was still in existence, and it was particularly incensed that its rival, the CIO, was given such a prominent role in the planning. Nevertheless, an impressive and diverse gathering of union delegates met in London in February 1945 to discuss the future of the international labor movement. The enthusiasm for a new transnational labor organization could not be contained, and union leaders were elected to

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Citrine, who served concurrently as General Secretary of the British TUC and President of the IFTU, toured the Soviet Union in 1935. He was not part of the later IFTU delegation, but his opinions of the Soviet Union were already well documented in a book he published about his journey, *I Search for Truth in Russia* (1936). Citrine was concerned with the concentration of power in the communist party, and he doubted the independence of the labor movement.

draft a constitution for the new organization. The inaugural congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) was held in Paris in September 1945. Delegates attended from over 56 countries, territories, and colonial areas, representing 65 national and local labor organizations, the IFTU, and 17 ITSS. The conference claimed to represent 67 million workers worldwide (Lorwin 1953, 212). The WFTU offered a rare moment of optimism for genuine international labor solidarity among former antagonists (Silverman 1999).

The bold attempt at solidarity with the Soviet unions quickly became entangled in the geo-political fallout of post-World War II reconstruction. The Soviets viewed the proposed Marshall Plan from the United States as a threat to their influence in the region and they actively lobbied against it. The British TUC and many western European unions viewed the plan, also known as the European Recovery Program (ERP), as indispensable relief to European workers, but they could not convince the WFTU's Executive Board, which was predominantly influenced by the communists, to support it. Finally, in March 1948, the British TUC convened a European Recovery Plan Conference, signaling a major rift within the WFTU. Displeased with the disproportionate influence of the Soviets, its lack of progress in incorporating the ITSS within its structures, and its obstinacy towards the ERP, the British called for a suspension of WFTU activities at the January 1949 WFTU Executive Board meeting (Carew 1999). The CIO representative, Jim Carey, was blunt in his assessment of the WFTU: he declared at the meeting, "It is no use pretending that the WFTU is anything but a corpse. Let us bury it" (quoted in Lorwin 1953, 260). Henceforth, the British TUC,

the CIO, and ultimately most of the western European unions withdrew from the organization.

The AF of L seized the opportunity to promote a rival TLO, and with the mutual agreement and participation of both the CIO and the TUC, they began to prepare for another international union conference. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) was founded in London on December 7, 1949. The word “free” was introduced in its name to emphasize its distinction from the ostensibly communist-associated WFTU and to promote free unionism, meaning “unions free from political or employer domination and free to represent the interests of their membership” (Carew 1999, 149). At its inaugural congress, delegates from 59 national federations, representing 48 million workers, were in attendance (Windmuller 1980, 48). The ICFTU and the WFTU were destined to spar with one another, as the lines of the Cold War were drawn.

The ITSs also rebuilt following World War II, and although the ITSs were present at the founding of the WFTU, they resisted being incorporated into the WFTU structure. Instead, most of the ITSs sided with the newly founded ICFTU, and once again they accepted a deferential role to the ICFTU in matters of general policy. In the 1951 Milan Agreement, the ITSs and the ICFTU acknowledged that they were all part of the same international labor movement and called for cooperation in areas of common interests (Gordon 2000, 89). Although the ITSs retained their autonomy, there were mutual exchanges of representation with the ICFTU in their respective governing bodies.

The geographical expansion of the “international” labor movement proceeded rapidly in the post-war era. The ICFTU in particular took an interest in nurturing free

unionism in the developing world (no doubt, motivated by anti-communist sentiment). The ICFTU adopted regional structures within its organization. In November 1950, a European Regional Organization (ERO) was established in Brussels; the Inter-American Regional Organization (ORIT) soon followed in January 1951; and then the Asian Regional Organization (ARO) in May 1951 (Lorwin 1953, 275-276). Although an African conference was also convened in 1951, the African Regional Organization (AFRO) was not established until 1960. The regional structures of the ICFTU were under the jurisdiction and rules of the ICFTU, but they operated in relative autonomy and could host regional congresses and elect regional leaders. From time to time, the regional organizations were at odds with the ICFTU Secretariat based in Brussels, especially ORIT, which was dominated by the AFL-CIO (Carew 2000, 224). In 1973, the ERO, keeping pace with the evolution of the European Community, evolved into an autonomous organization, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), but continued to maintain close ties to the ICFTU.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the ICFTU's and WFTU's regional organizations, the international labor movement was certainly not wanting in organizations. In 1962, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC), comprised of national union centers from developed countries, became a permanent fixture of the newly created Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The International Federation of Christian Trade Unions, which had also reorganized following the war, morphed into a broader – but still spiritually grounded – World Confederation of Labor (WCL) in 1968. Autonomous regional TLOs were also created in Africa (Organization of African Trade Union Unity)

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<sup>6</sup> The ICFTU Secretariat and the ETUC Secretariat share the same building in Brussels, Belgium.

and the Middle East (International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions) (Windmuller 1980).

The politics of the Cold War drew greater attention to unions in the developing world, but not necessarily in a good way. The AF of L had merged with the CIO in 1955, and the AFL-CIO regularly undermined or bypassed the ICFTU's regional structures to support developing unions abroad through their "free" labor institutes established in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Fantasia and Voss 2004, 58). The AFL-CIO's Department of International Affairs promoted an aggressive anti-communist position, and the activities of the AFL-CIO during the Cold War were sometimes seen more as "interventionism rather than solidarity" (Gordon and Turner 2000, 19). Many union leaders outside of the United States believed that the collusion between the AFL-CIO and the US government in the fight against communism was hypocritical and damaging to indigenous union movements (Shorrock 2003). An infamous 1978 *War on Want* report, entitled "Where were you, brother?," exposed union imperialism in the Third World and the total neglect on the part of the international labor movement in regard to the poverty plaguing most developing countries (Thomson and Larson 1978).

The Cold War not only divided the ICFTU and the WFTU but also caused tension between the Americans and Europeans within the ICFTU. AFL-CIO leaders did not trust the Europeans, eventually prompting the AFL-CIO to disaffiliate from the ICFTU from 1969 to 1984 (Moody 1997, 231). Just prior to their disaffiliation, Windmuller characterized the mood:

The kind of militant anti-Communism which the AFL-CIO has considered an indispensable attribute to the ICFTU has never held out much appeal to most European trade unions. In recent years, in fact, bilateral encounters between European Communist and non-Communist trade unions have

been increasing, much to the chagrin of American trade unions and very much at the expense of internal cohesion (1967, 95).

Assessing the ICFTU on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Windmuller wrote, “Tensions and abrasiveness have characterized the relations between the ICFTU and AFL-CIO for almost two decades” (1970, 511). Despite breaking off official ties to the ICFTU, the American unions continued to be very active internationally promoting their “business” union model abroad in order to contain the spread of communism.

The eventual demise of the Soviet Union and their self-proclaimed workers’ utopia discredited communism, and the end of the Cold War was seen as a triumph for free unionism and free enterprise. The AFL-CIO received accolades for its support of the underground Solidarity movement in Poland and for its stalwart (and at times covert) anti-communist campaigns (Puddington 2005), but the distrust it gained through some of its activities has yet to be won back. The rebuilding of the international labor movement would commence once again, but in this new post-Cold War era, the economic repercussions of globalization would surface as the primary threat to workers worldwide. Thus, the post-Cold War era would offer another rare opportunity for greater international labor solidarity, especially against the growing concentration and mobility of capital.

### **Global Labor in the Post-Cold War Era**

Eventually, most of the organized workers of the former Soviet Union and its Eastern bloc allies left the WFTU and joined ranks with the ITSs and the ICFTU increasing the geographical unity of the international labor movement. In the aftermath of the Cold War, the ICFTU was viewed as “effectively the only show in town” (Cohen

2002, 210).<sup>7</sup> Ironically, however, now that the communist threat had been essentially eliminated, international affairs did not merit the priority that it once enjoyed among union elites. Changes in the AFL-CIO's leadership are indicative of this. For example, the staunch Cold War warrior - Lane Kirkland - and his handpicked successor lost the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995 to a more progressive ticket that put John Sweeney at the helm of the organization. Under Sweeney, the AFL-CIO promised to put more resources into organizing US workers, and in the process, it streamlined its regional free labor institutes into a single Solidarity Center. More recently, the AFL-CIO, after losing several important affiliates to the Change to Win Federation, abolished its Department of International Affairs for a brief period of time in 2005-2006.<sup>8</sup>

In the post-Cold War, globalization became the new buzzword and neo-liberal economic policies were being promoted throughout the world to encourage rapid privatization and foreign direct investment. Unions found themselves targeted as obstacles to economic efficiency. After World War II, the working classes of the industrialized countries had benefited from what John G. Ruggie (1982) termed "embedded liberalism," which promoted Keynesian economics, essential social services, and prospects for a better standard of living for the working classes. However, the social contract between organized labor and governments, which embedded liberalism was dependent on, began unraveling even before the end of the Cold War (e.g. President Reagan's firing of striking air traffic controllers and Margaret Thatcher's "iron-fisted" clamp down on British trade unions). The abandonment of the working classes in favor

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<sup>7</sup> The WFTU continues to exist but with a significantly reduced membership.

<sup>8</sup> AFL-CIO official, interview, August 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

of economic liberalization and capital mobility significantly hurt national union movements.

The discourse of globalization has been dominated by neo-liberal dogmatism, and trade unions are typically cast as its victims. Andrew Herod noted that, “there has been a tendency to portray workers as structurally defenseless in the face of a hypermobile, rapidly restructuring, and globally organized capital” (1997, 169). Jane Wills argued, “The rhetoric of globalization serves to detract from the traditions of internationalism and transnational organization which have always been part of the trade union movement” (1998, 115). There is no question that unions are facing significant challenges due to the increased globalization of capital and trade (Fairbrother and Griffin 2002). However, unions have responded to these challenges by employing revitalization strategies to breathe new life into their movements, and a growing literature on union revitalization is documenting these efforts (Frege and Kelly 2004; Fairbrother and Yates 2003; Turner, Katz, and Hurd 2001). Regardless of the eventual effects of such renewed efforts, while unions struggle nationally, resources are diverted from international activities.

Old cleavages within the international labor movement have been replaced with new ones. Globalization ushered in an era of free trade and rapid economic liberalization, which expanded foreign markets. Multinational corporations (MNCs) pounced and took advantage of this new access to cheaper labor. At once, unions felt threatened as jobs began to drift overseas. Advances in technology and communication along with governments anxious to attract foreign investments facilitated the mobility of capital. Alarmed by the proliferation of free trade agreements, many unions took up the social clause mantle. A social clause would recognize minimum labor standards as a

condition for free trade and offer protection for workers (van Roozendaal 2002).

However, several unions from the Global South have expressed strong reservations – and in some cases – outright opposition to a social clause. Gerda van Roozendaal explained that, “Some trade union organizations and governments of developing countries are reluctant to support this demand [for a social clause], because they do not trust the expressed view of the ICFTU that a social clause would be in the interests of all” (2002, 219). They suspect that the motive behind the social clause is to legitimate calls for protectionism by unions of the Global North.

The ICFTU and the ITSs have worked hard to adapt to the changing contours of the economic environment. The ITSs changed their collective name to “Global Union Federations” (GUFs) at their annual meeting in Prague in 2002. They also partnered with the ICFTU and the TUAC in launching a common platform, under the auspices of “Global Unions,” which includes a common website. While the ICFTU has taken the lead in the fight for social clauses and workers’ rights internationally, the GUFs have chosen to concentrate on establishing framework agreements with multinational corporations. International Framework Agreements (IFAs) are agreements negotiated between multinational corporations and GUFs, which recognize basic workers’ rights. Although these agreements are generally weak because they are non-binding, they represent a positive step for unions that “may well legitimate the role of unions in global industrial relations” (Stavis 2007, 180).

On November 1, 2006, amidst much fanfare in international labor circles but virtually ignored in the popular international press, the ICFTU and its longtime rival, the WCL, merged into the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Thus, another

milestone was added to the annals of international labor history. In theory, the international labor movement was finally united under a single TLO, which now represents 168 million workers from 311 national affiliates in 155 countries and territories.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the Council of Global Unions was established to coordinate the activities of the ITUC, the TUAC, and the GUFs. Its stated aims are “to promote cooperation and joint global trade union solidarity, mobilization, advocacy and campaigns, while maintaining the autonomy of the participating organizations” (ITUC 2007). However, if history is any indication of the future, this unity cannot be taken for granted. In fact, the International Metalworkers’ Federation has already refused to ratify the agreement establishing the Council (Traub-Merz and Eckl 2007). The ITUC is “new” but it inherits the baggage – for better or for worse – of its predecessors.

### **Analysis**

There are several important conclusions that can be drawn from a historical analysis of the international labor movement. First, division within the international labor movement was common throughout its history. The IFTU and the RILU – and later the ICFTU and the WFTU – differed over political ideology (e.g. social democrats v. communists). Nationality was also a source of division, especially following the outbreak of two world wars. Policy disputes between union elites were also quite common. For example, the AF of L, and later the AFL-CIO, often disagreed with their western European counterparts and withheld its affiliation with the IFTU (1919-1937) and the ICFTU (1969-1984) for periods of time. Other sources of contention included the treatment of unions in the developing world and the dominance of a small number of

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<sup>9</sup> Updated membership lists can be found at <http://www.ituc-csi.org/>

strong unions. The goal of international labor solidarity was compromised by divisions within the international labor movement throughout most of its history.

Although the international labor movement is more united than it ever has been under the newly created ITUC, obstacles to international labor solidarity remain. Debates over “new” versus “old” labor internationalism have been raised over the lack of rank-and-file participation in the international labor movement. Peter Waterman critiqued the ICFTU as “an institution formally subordinate to national(ist) unions...it is at the peak of a pyramidal structure several removes – and gatekeepers – away from any flesh-and-blood workers” (2001, 315). Others call for a more radical and grassroots movement among workers and criticize TLOs for engaging in social dialogue with multinational corporations and governments (Moody 1997). Several unions remain divided over the social clause campaign that has been spearheaded by the ITUC. Nationalism and xenophobia are also tempting diversions from international labor solidarity, especially when workers are pitted against one another by MNCs and national economies suffer through recessions. In sum, global labor cannot be conceived as a cohesive unit that operates on the global stage, but rather a conglomerate of very diverse and decentralized national union organizations that sometimes cooperate successfully with one another.

Second, despite these internal challenges, TLOs will continue to work under the premise that international labor solidarity is possible and that workers worldwide share common interests. TLOs, like the Global Unions, are the most representative worker organizations in the international political system, and this is a characteristic that separates them from national unions. TLOs offer an established institutional network that provides an essential framework for global labor. Gordon argues, “If the Confederation

[ICFTU] did not exist, trade unions would have to create a similar organization to deal with international matters on behalf of workers and national unions” (2000, 98). National unions maintain affiliations with TLOs because they perform important functions for their affiliates, which will be outlined in the following chapter. TLOs also help to open political opportunity structures so that unions can pursue their interests at the international level.

Third, TLOs were designed to be subordinate to the interests of national unions. In an era of unprecedented globalization, one would expect Global Unions to boldly lead the international labor movement into the new millennium. Instead, they have largely taken a backseat to national union movements. This nationalist mindset has been etched into the foundation of global labor’s house, dating back to the founding of the first ITSs and the ISNTUC at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Over the course of the next 100 years, the names and priorities of TLOs have changed but the foundation essentially remains the same. The price of international labor solidarity rarely comes at the cost of the autonomy of national unions, especially the more powerful ones.

Finally, the history of the international labor movement exposes its inherent contradiction. National unions express their commitment to international labor solidarity by creating TLOs, yet are driven by interests that sometimes conflict with this goal. In order to understand the potential for global labor, the complex and diverse nature of the international labor movement must be acknowledged. Forces within the international labor movement will often work against itself. Instead of assessing the success or failure of global labor in terms of international labor solidarity, an analysis of global labor must recognize that national unions are political bodies that serve the interests of their national

membership. International labor solidarity is not an end to be achieved but rather a means for national unions to pursue their own interests, which sometimes coincide with those of other unions and TLOs.

## CHAPTER 3

### GLOBAL UNIONS AS AGENTS OF NATIONAL UNIONS

#### Introduction

On November 1, 2006, labor history was made at the founding congress of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in Vienna, Austria. It was the result of a merger between the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Confederation of Labor (WCL), whose combined membership now totals 311 affiliates from 155 countries and territories representing 168 million workers.<sup>10</sup> In his acceptance speech, the newly elected General Secretary, Guy Ryder, stated:

The message we send out from Vienna to working people in all lands is that the International Trade Union Confederation is born from our common determination to provide them a single voice, strength, solidarity, and an instrument to improve and transform their lives, communities and societies. The different traditions, inspirations, and histories that have brought all of us along the converging roads to Vienna are part of our strength (ITUC 2006).

After decades of competition among peak transnational labor organizations, national union centers were finally organized around a single organization. The merger has given the international labor movement more “credibility” and has made it appear “stronger” according to one official that I interviewed.<sup>11</sup> The ITUC, the Trade Union Advisory Council (TUAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and eleven Global Union Federations (GUFs), formerly International Trade Secretariats (ITSs), are collectively known as Global Unions, and they now stand at the pinnacle of the international labor movement. Global Unions have deep historical roots,

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<sup>10</sup> Membership information obtained from the ITUC’s website: [www.ituc-csi.org](http://www.ituc-csi.org) - accessed July 26, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Global Union official, interview, July 18, 2007, Washington, D.C.

but little is known about them outside labor elite circles. This chapter explores the role that Global Unions play within the international labor movement and the voice that they lend to global labor.

On the basis of an extensive survey of Global Unions' activities and interviews with key officials, I argue that Global Unions perform several critical functions for their affiliates. Most importantly, they promote the interests of workers at the international level and embody the international labor movement. Thus, Global Unions are an essential part of global labor; however, they are dependent on national unions to support and sustain their activities. In the previous chapter, I referred to this as the inherent contradiction of the international labor movement. Global Unions are driven by the premise that international labor solidarity is possible. They work to identify common interests among workers worldwide and act to advance those interests. Of course, this job is made difficult by cleavages that exist among their members and their limited resources. More importantly, Global Unions offer a framework to express the voices of workers on a global scale. Although I conclude that the driving force behind global labor ultimately rests with the transnational activities of national unions, Global Unions serve as important but subsidiary organizations.

As part of my research on Global Unions, I interviewed current and former officials from Global Unions in Washington, D.C., Brussels, Geneva, Nyon, and The Hague. My interviewees offered valuable insight into both the strengths and weaknesses of Global Unions, and I am indebted to their cooperation. In addition, I have analyzed official documents of Global Unions, including reports, speeches, newsletters, and

resolutions. I have also benefited from the work of others who have studied transnational labor organizations (Lorwin 1953; Windmuller 1980; Stevis 1998).

This chapter is organized in several parts. First, I (re)introduce Global Unions, and briefly describe their structures and governance. I also highlight similarities and differences among them. Second, I survey the literature on Global Unions. Generally, there is a consensus that Global Unions are politically weak and heavily influenced by and dependent on dominant national unions. Overall, I agree with this assessment of Global Unions; however, in the third section, I argue that Global Unions perform several important functions for their affiliates, which provide a substantive voice for global labor. I put forth and explain five functions that Global Unions perform on behalf of their affiliates. Finally, I analyze the weaknesses and strengths of Global Unions and conclude that the future of global labor rests in the hands of national unions acting in concert with Global Unions.

### **What are Global Unions?**

Global Unions are examples of transnational labor organizations (TLOs). Global Unions have universally based memberships, as opposed to regional TLOs, such as the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Their membership is comprised of national union federations (ITUC and the TUAC) or national unions (GUFs). Global Unions include ITUC, TUAC, Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI), Education International (EI), International Arts and Entertainment Alliance (IAEA), International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Union (ICEM), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Metalworkers'

Federation (IMF), International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Association (IUF), Public Services International (PSI), and Union Network International (UNI). Collectively, they maintain a joint website offering links to news and information. Their website describes Global Unions as "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 labor standards everywhere, and to promote the growth of trade unions for the benefit of all working men and women and their families."<sup>12</sup> Global Unions share some common characteristics but there are also substantive differences. This section will offer a brief overview of Global Unions.

National union federations, such as the AFL-CIO and the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB), are members of the ITUC and the TUAC. Membership in the TUAC is limited to national union centers whose governments are members of the OECD. National unions are members of the GUFs that are generally divided into economic sectors or industries such as education, mining, or transportation. Over the years, as a result of mergers, GUFs tend to represent multiple industries and/or economic sectors. It is not uncommon for national unions to be affiliated with more than one GUF. For example, the UK Transport and General Workers' Union is affiliated with eight GUFs (EIRR 2000, 31). Generally, there is variation among the GUFs in terms of membership, budget, and staff, but GUFs perform similar functions for their affiliates and are comparably governed.

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<sup>12</sup> Global Unions' website: <http://www.global-unions.org/>

The ITUC and the GUFs have a long history of cooperation. For the most part, the GUFs have deferred to the ITUC in matters of general labor policies, while GUFs have dealt more specifically with multinational corporations and industry standards such as health and safety. The ITUC Constitution defines their relationship with GUFs: “The Confederation recognizes the autonomy and responsibility of the global union federations with regard to representation and trade union action in their respective sectors and in relevant multinational enterprises, and the importance of sectoral action to the trade union movement as a whole” (Article VI, paragraph a). In addition, representatives from both the TUAC and GUFs are granted the right to attend and participate in ITUC Congresses and its General Council but not the right to vote.

To further enhance cooperation among the Global Unions, representatives from the ITUC and the GUFs signed a founding agreement, which formed the Council of Global Unions, in January 2007. In a letter to his affiliates, ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder wrote, “The purpose of the Council is to promote cooperation and joint global trade union solidarity, mobilization, advocacy and campaigns, while maintaining the autonomy of the participating organizations” (ITUC 2007a). The IMF did not sign the agreement but was present as an observer.<sup>13</sup> One of its first official acts was to sponsor a global organizing conference in Washington, D.C. in December 2007. The Council of Global Unions convened for the second time in January 2008 and agreed on a budget, leadership, and a number of joint projects, including supporting a Global Unions office in Washington, D.C. (ICEM 2008).

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<sup>13</sup> The IMF has a history of independence and resistance towards greater institutionalization among Global Unions (U.S. Department of Labor, 1959).

The governing bodies of the respective Global Unions are similarly structured. Ultimate authority and power resides in a congress that meets on a regular basis (either every three, four, or five years).<sup>14</sup> The number of voting delegates that affiliated members are entitled to send to the congress is usually based on the size of their dues-paying membership. In between congresses, an interim governing body - typically an executive committee elected by the congress, which meets at least annually - is charged with overseeing the implementation of the programs and resolutions passed by the congress. Additionally, most Global Unions have another level of governance – a steering committee or presidium – that is chosen by the executive committee and is often comprised of the officers and the general secretary of the organization. It is important to note that officers and executive committee members of Global Unions serve in dual capacities as both leaders and/or staff members of their respective national union and as representatives of the Global Union, whereas the general secretary and his or her secretariat are typically full-time employees of the Global Union. The substantive work of the congress, including preparing the resolutions and programs for consideration, takes place prior to the congress and is organized by the secretariat.

The budgets of Global Unions are principally funded by affiliation dues, and many Global Unions are experiencing budgetary crunches. The general secretary of the IMF recently declared, “Our membership and responsibilities are growing faster than our resources” (IMF 2005, 3). Congresses determine affiliation fees, and in most cases, arrangements are made to adjust dues rates according to the financial situation of a union. Thus, more affluent unions tend to pay more in affiliation fees. In 1959, the AFL-CIO,

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<sup>14</sup> The TUAC is an exception. It has consultative status within the 30-member country OECD, and it meets in a Plenary Session twice per year. However, ultimate decision-making authority rests with the Plenary Session.

the DGB, and the British Trades Union Congress (TUC) made up 50 percent of the ICFTU's membership (Windmuller 1961, 261). In 2004, these three unions made up about 16.4 percent<sup>15</sup> of the ICFTU's membership indicating the "internationalization" of its membership. However, this growth has not translated into larger coffers, and in fact, Global Unions are often receiving *less* in affiliation fees for the simple reason that their more affluent affiliates are losing members. For example, despite an increase in membership of 28 million from 1999 to 2003, the ICFTU received 0.04 percent less in affiliation fees in 2003 than what was accrued in 1998 (ICFTU 2004b, 266). In 2006, the ITF general secretary reported, "The proportion of ITF affiliated unions paying fees at less than the standard rate has continued to rise significantly during the inter-Congress period. In July 1998 it was 48% of unions representing almost 30% of membership; in July 2002 it was 61% of unions representing 28% of membership; and in April 2006 it was 64% of unions representing 28% of membership" (ITF 2006, 14). "More resources" was a common response of officials when I asked them what was needed to strengthen their organizations. The bottom line is that most Global Unions are expected to do more with less.

Financial considerations have encouraged mergers among Global Unions in the past couple of decades. For example, UNI is the result of the merger between International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET), Communications International (CI), International Graphical Federation (IGF), and Media and Entertainment International (MEI) in January 2000. The ICEM, which was created in 1995 as a result of merger between the Chemical Workers (ICEF) and the

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<sup>15</sup> Figure was calculated by the author taking membership data from the ICFTU's Report on Activities for the period of January 1, 1999 to December 31, 2003.

Miners' International Federation (MIF), is currently in discussions with the IMF towards a possible future merger and they have invited other Global Unions, including the ITGLWF and BWI to consider joining them. At its 2007 World Congress, it was resolved that the ICEM would move its headquarters from Brussels into the building that is occupied by the IMF in Geneva (ICEM 2007).

In many cases, Global Unions have reduced their staffs. In 2003, the general secretary of the ICEM reported that staff in its Brussels headquarters was reduced from 25 to 18 since the last Congress in 1999 (ICEM 2003, 4). In 2004, the ICEM controversially closed its regional offices further reducing its overall staff by ten (ICEM 2007). At one time the ICFTU enjoyed a staff of about 130 in their Brussels-based office, but by 2005, the staff had shrunk to about 80.<sup>16</sup> The ITGLWF has a small staff of four, which includes the general secretary, in its Brussels-based office (ITGLWF 2004).

Many Global Unions are turning to donors to fund projects or regional offices. An official from the ICEM explained that as many as 29 projects were being funded by outside donors, in some cases, this money comes from governments.<sup>17</sup> An IFBWW official admitted that about 50% of their budget comes from donors and that donor-funded projects, including projects targeting child labor, have become important work of their organization.<sup>18</sup> However, not everyone agrees that this is the best course of action because it could potentially undermine unions' financial independence.<sup>19</sup> Carew argues that this could be a dangerous trend whereby Global Unions operate increasingly as

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<sup>16</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>17</sup> ICEM official, interview, June 3, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>18</sup> IFBWW official, interview, June 6, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>19</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

NGOs, “an agency running programs and dispersing funds without much involvement of the membership base” (2002, 18).

Each of the Global Unions (with the exception of IAEA) maintains its own website apart from the Global Unions’ website. Individual websites offer news bulletins and updates. Email is regularly used by Global Unions to keep affiliates informed, and in some cases, to call upon them to support campaigns. Cyber-campaigns have become more common because computer technology makes it possible to disseminate information and solicit international support quickly (for examples see Shostak 2002). However, an official from the IFBWW lamented the fact that she had received more responses to urgent fax requests and from mailings than she does from email. She guessed that her affiliates were inundated with emails.<sup>20</sup> Cyber-campaigns offer a double-edged sword. On one hand, they are rather easy and efficient to manage, but on the other hand, they are harder to prioritize, as affiliates can easily be overwhelmed with cyber-requests and too much information.

The headquarters of Global Unions are all based in Europe (Switzerland, France, Belgium, and United Kingdom). It is not too surprising then that European unions tend to be particularly active in staffing and participating in Global Unions. In fact, the secretariats of the ITUC and the ETUC occupy the same building (International Trade Union House) in Brussels, Belgium. European Industry Federations (EIFs) are the regional counterparts to GUFs, and although these organizations are autonomous, they often work closely with their respective GUFs and share resources. Most of the Global Unions accommodate regional offices and/or organizations within their structure. For

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<sup>20</sup> Interview, IFBWW Headquarters, Geneva, June 6, 2005.

example, according to its website, EI maintains regional offices in Ghana, Malaysia, Costa Rica, and St. Lucia.

In name, Global Unions are recent embodiments of the international labor movement to effectively represent the workers in a global economy. In reality, these organizations are not novel. They have been around for many, many years. The IMF was established in 1896. The need for transnational labor organization was realized very early in organized labor's history dating as far back to the International Working Men's Association (a.k.a. the First International) in 1864. Nevertheless, there is a sense of opportunity among Global Unions. In the past decade, there have been significant steps toward increasing cooperation among Global Unions. However, these steps come at a time when many national unions are struggling with declining memberships. The next section surveys the literature on Global Unions and its predecessors.

### **The History and Limits of Global Unions**

Much of the literature on Global Unions has focused predominantly on their historical antecedents. There are several impressive histories of the international labor movement. Notably, Lewis Lorwin wrote extensively on the international labor movement throughout his scholarly career (see especially Lorwin 1929, 1953, 1957). John Windmuller also dedicated his research to international industrial relations (see Windmuller 1961, 1967, 1970, 1980, 2000). More recently, a comprehensive anthology of the ICFTU and its predecessors was published on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ICFTU (van der Linden *et al* 2000). Indeed, the history of Global Unions and their predecessors, which spans well over 100 years, is aptly documented, and it reveals the sometimes-tumultuous relationships among union leaders and rival organizations that had competing

visions for the international labor movement. Although not always united, Global Unions have persevered, albeit under different auspices, into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, societies were being transformed by rapid industrialization. Nascent labor movements were budding throughout Europe and North America, and transnational labor organizations were a key component to their early development. By 1914, there were 27 ITSs, representing workers in a variety of trades (Lorwin 1953, 31). However, the enthusiasm for early labor internationalism was vanquished by the reality of geo-politics and the nationalization of the working classes when the international labor movement failed to prevent the outbreaks of World War I and World II. Lorwin concluded, “During its earlier stages, the leaders of the international labor movement believed that it would become the main directive in international affairs. In the light of the experience of the past hundred years, it is clear that international labor organizations can be no more than a subsidiary factor in international life” (1957, 11). Although national unions established their dominance early on, transnational labor organizations endured throughout the history of the international labor movement.

Long before “globalization” was in vogue, ITSs helped to organize workers in response to the growth of multinational corporations. The AFL-CIO, the United Autoworkers (UAW), and the IMF were influential in establishing the first World Company Councils in the mid-to-late 1960s. World Company Councils were international meetings or networks of employees working for the same multinational corporation. Although World Company Councils were first created in the auto industry (including Ford and General Motors), between 1969 and 1977 there were also 26 World

Company Councils in the chemical industry (Rüb 2002, 9). World Company Councils raised the profile of ITSSs, and there were high expectations that World Company Councils would be poised to engage in multinational collective bargaining (MNCB) with multinational corporations.

Some predicted that MNCB was an inevitable strategy for organized labor to counter the growth of multinational corporations (Levinson 1972). In an analysis of labor and transnational relations, Cox argued, “At the present time the international trade secretariats appear to have the greatest potential to develop as transnational structures by organizing trade union action vis-à-vis the multinational corporation” (1971, 579). However, early optimism for MNCB faded, and collective bargaining remained in the purview of national industrial relations systems. Multinational corporations were steadfast in their determination to prevent it. One comprehensive study on the topic argued that the varying laws and practices of countries, management opposition, union reluctance, and lack of employee interest all explained why MNCB did not evolve (Northrup and Rowan 1979).

Nevertheless, Global Unions and their predecessors have worked to establish voluntary standards for MNCs. The ICFTU and the TUAC participated in the debate that ultimately led to the 1976 OECD Guidelines for Multinational Corporations, which was updated in 2000. Although the guidelines are relatively weak, they helped to set in motion campaigns in the 1970s, including adoption of the 1977 ILO Declaration on Principles Concerning Multinational Enterprises, to hold MNCs more accountable for their business practices.

Although the first World Company Councils fell short of expectations, the benefits of transnational networking were heeded and Global Unions have continued to coordinate networks among unions dealing with a common employer. For example, the steering committee of the Industry, Business, and Information Technology Services (IBITS) sector of UNI, which is comprised of eight major affiliates, planned a global day of action on May 23, 2005 against IBM after they announced major layoffs.<sup>21</sup> The IUF regularly facilitates meetings among its affiliates that work for Nestle and Coca-cola. Further cooperation among affiliates has been aided by a 1994 European Union directive that mandated the creation of European Works Councils (EWCs). EWCs have helped to lay the groundwork to increase global participation of non-European unions (Wills 2001). Facilitating meetings among unions dealing with a common employer have increased transnational contacts among workers. However, these networks are “horizontally” rather than “vertically” organized and as such, their ability to function authoritatively remains limited. In a case study on the labor practices of McDonalds involving Global Unions and their national affiliates, Pablo Ghigliani concluded that there is “no linear relationship between national and international organizations” (2005, 376).

Although industrial relations remain embedded in national institutions, Global Unions have had some success in negotiating International Framework Agreements (IFAs) with multinational corporations. IFAs are agreements negotiated between GUFs and multinational corporations that establish “a set of minimum labor standards and a process of social dialogue for further advances” (Torres 2004, 3). Most agreements incorporate the ILO’s core conventions into its language. The IUF is credited with the first such agreement in 1994 with the French-based food multinational Danone (Thorpe

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<sup>21</sup> UNI official, interview, June 7, 2005, Nyons, Switzerland

1999, 227). Since then GUFs have actively pursued IFAs, and as of January 22, 2007, 55 IFAs have been agreed upon (Stavis and Boswell 2008, 174).

IFAs represent an important step in promoting corporate social responsibility (CSR) among multinational corporations (Riisgaard 2005). For example, an agreement between Volkswagen, the IMF, and the Volkswagen EWC “requires the company to provide its workers worldwide the right to form unions, protection against discrimination, a safe working environment, and minimum wage standards consistent with local conditions” (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2006). IFAs directly involve GUFs in a negotiation process with multinational corporations; however, they are limited in that they are non-binding agreements and for the most part are geographically biased towards European multinational corporations (Stavis and Boswell 2008). IFAs are a promising trend toward increased global governance, but there are significant questions about the efficacy of such agreements, including problems of enforcement and universality (Stavis and Boswell 2008). An IUF official stated that monitoring and implementing these agreements are very time consuming and drain valuable resources.<sup>22</sup>

Global Unions are also involved in transnational advocacy campaigns, including campaigns on sweatshop labor, child labor, HIV/AIDs, and poverty. For example, Global Unions worked in concert with Oxfam and the Clean Clothes Campaign to organize the “Play Fair at the Olympics” campaign targeting the 2004 and 2008 Olympics to draw attention to the harsh working conditions of workers in the sports apparel industry. Education International has teamed up with a consortium of NGOs in the ongoing Global Campaign for Education (Mundy and Murphy 2001). Finally, the IFBWW has been involved in donor funded projects to build schools for children and

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<sup>22</sup> IUF official, interview, June 7, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

they have worked closely with the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC).<sup>23</sup> Campaigns such as these are a way for Global Unions to become more involved in global civil society. Josselin believes that "the temptation to ride on the back of the NSMs [new social movements] is even stronger for international trade union federations, for whom the social movement model provides a unique opportunity to reconcile diverse affiliates around a common agenda" (2001, 179-180).

Despite the growing literature on "new" labor internationalism and global social movement unionism, Global Unions are often critiqued as conservative, bureaucratic, and out of touch with the rank-and-file. Sarah Ashwin pointed out that "while organizations such as Oxfam and Amnesty International are household names, few have heard of the world's largest international trade union organization, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) or even the more prominent international trade secretariats (ITSs)" (2000, 101). Kim Moody describes the ICFTU as "far removed from the realities of today's workplace and the thoughts and concerns of labor's rank-and-file worldwide (1997, 229-230). Most of the officials that I interviewed admitted that they were disconnected from the rank-and-file. An ICFTU official explained that most rank-and-file workers that she spoke with did not have a clue what the ICFTU stood for much less what it actually did.<sup>24</sup> The autonomy of national unions is preserved in Global Unions' constitutions, and this has prevented Global Unions from engaging directly with workers. For example, the ITUC Constitution states in Article II, paragraph b: "Member organizations shall retain their full autonomy at national level." Similar clauses are included in the constitutions of GUFs. The PSI Constitution states in Article IV,

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<sup>23</sup> IFBWW official, interview, June 6, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>24</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005

paragraph 6: “The autonomy of affiliated organizations shall not be affected by affiliation to the PSI.”

Another problem faced by Global Unions is the low priority that national unions give to international affairs. International interests are forced to compete with national interests for attention and resources, and the latter will typically prevail. Industrial relations are embedded predominantly in national institutions, thus labor transnationalism tends to be an ancillary activity of national unions. John Price argued, “The needs and interests of the affiliated sections in their own countries will overshadow their desire to cooperate internationally” (1947, 169).

In his study of transnational labor organizations, Dimitris Stevis (1998) distinguishes between intersocietal and transsocietal organizations. Intersocietal organizations are organizations mediated by national gatekeepers, while transsocietal organizations allow for more participation and direct membership of individuals and groups. While Stevis cites the First International as an example of a transsocietal organization, he concludes that contemporary transnational labor organizations “are fundamentally weak intersocietal confederations,” and thus, he believes that, “the central task confronting activist unions is not to simply mobilize them. More importantly, they need to address their inherent organizational and political weaknesses” (1998, 65). Stevis believes that the international labor movement would be better served with more transsocietalism, but he concedes for organizations, like the ICFTU, change “will have to start outside of the organization” (62).

Global Unions have also been accused of being pawns of powerful national unions. Moody argued, “As an organization of organizations the ICFTU is naturally

dominated by the largest and richest national labor federations. These are the AFL-CIO, Germany's DGB, and Rengo, Japan's major and most conservative labor federation" (1997, 231). Some believe that powerful national unions are more interested in promoting their interests than working for the greater good of all workers (Thomson and Larson 1978). Beth Sims argued that during the Cold War the AFL-CIO only supported unions that were "most receptive to U.S. economic and political influence in their countries and to the notions of 'business unionism'" (1992, 4). She concluded, "Instead of advancing the cause of international worker solidarity, the AFL-CIO has undermined it" (2). Furthermore, in their relations with less affluent unions, some affluent unions have developed a donor mentality approach, which sometimes results in strained relations.<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick concluded, "The fear expressed by Asian affiliates [of the ICFTU] of a 'Balkanization' of the developing countries through the control of projects by a few affiliates from the industrialized world has to a large extent come true" (2004, 189). Mark Anner (2007) has identified a paradox of labor transnationalism, whereby weak unions of the Global South accede to the goals and strategies of stronger unions in the Global North in exchange for much needed support.

In conclusion, the literature on Global Unions tends to highlight their weaknesses. They are agents of national unions that are limited in their capacity to act independently. At this time, national affiliates are generally not interested in expanding the competencies of Global Unions, especially as they cope with dwindling memberships and hostile, anti-union environments at home. Despite these circumstances, Global Unions have done a reasonably good job of promoting workers' rights and facilitating cooperation among unions. In most cases, they have managed to expand their memberships (either through

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<sup>25</sup> Interview, Brussels, Belgium; ICFTU headquarters, March 18, 2005

mergers or new affiliates) even while many of their affiliates are experiencing declines. Global Unions are unlikely to evolve into “super” unions any time soon, but they perform valuable functions for their affiliates that are essential to global labor.

### **Functions of Global Unions**

Global Unions are regularly critiqued for what they fail to do, but rarely do we take a critical look at what they are doing. Consensus building among literally hundreds of national unions exposes cleavages among workers, and international labor solidarity can never be taken for granted. Global Unions are plagued with the same problems that confront any universally based member organization, such as the United Nations. They must placate a variety of interests among their affiliates. However, the day-to-day work that Global Unions perform on behalf of their members is critical to global labor. Despite their weaknesses, I argue that Global Unions perform valuable functions for their affiliates.

Global Unions generally perform five major, interrelated functions. First, they perform a **representative function**. They represent and promote workers’ interests at the international level. Although the direct links to workers are dubious, the breadth of affiliates that Global Unions represent is impressive. Global Unions offer a constitutional framework of internal governance for their affiliates, which in principle is generally democratic. The mission of the Global Unions’ secretariats is to carry out the decisions of their affiliates, and they do this by representing their affiliates before international bodies. For example, the ITUC plays a crucial role in organizing the Workers’ Group within the ILO. The various committees of the Workers’ Group are supported by the ICFTU – now the ITUC – and the leaders and delegates who serve on these committees

are selected among a caucus of ITUC affiliates.<sup>26</sup> The ITUC also has consultative status with the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO (Gordon 2000). Global Unions participate in the annual World Economic Forum and the World Social Forum, and they are regularly present at a host of other international conferences.

In their capacity as worker representatives, Global Unions lobby intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs), and governments. They regularly pressure governments to ratify ILO conventions and uphold basic workers' rights. For example, in November 2007, the ITUC sent Colombian President Uribe a letter urging him to improve the situation in Colombia where 78 unionists were assassinated in 2006 (ITUC 2007b). Global Unions have pressed the WTO and governments to include social clauses in free trade agreements, which would guarantee core labor standards as a condition for free trade. GUFs also pressure MNCs directly, especially when workers' rights abuses have been brought to their attention by their national affiliates. The ICEM initiated a campaign, believed to be the first global trade union campaign to focus on a MNC, against the mining company Rio Tinto in 1996 (Goodman 2004, 106). In addition, Global Unions represent workers' interests in negotiating IFAs with multinational corporations.

Second, Global Unions perform a **monitoring function**. They monitor and report on trade union rights abuses all across the world. Defending and promoting trade union rights are one of the top priorities for Global Unions, especially the ITUC. They have been vigilant in casting spotlights on workers' rights abuses. For example, Global Unions have a long history of dispatching observers to trials of arrested unionists, sending letters of protest or concern to government leaders, filing complaints with the

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<sup>26</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association, and initiating transnational campaigns (e.g. campaign against child labor in Burma). In her contribution to the edited volume of the ICFTU's history, Gumbrell-McCormick concluded, "Yet while few British workers might have heard of the confederation, many workers in Africa, Chile or other trouble spots, where their colleagues have been arrested or killed, and others rescued through the intervention of the ICFTU or its affiliates, may well be aware of it, whether or not they know its name" (2000, 517). Since 1984, the ICFTU has published the *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights*, which is widely recognized as the authoritative report on countries who continue to ignore trade union rights (*Trade Union World* 1999, 51). The ICFTU also issues concurrent reports "on fundamental workers' rights legislation and practices" with WTO reviews of the trade policies of individual countries (ICFTU 2004a, 37). These reports are intended to draw attention to the correlation between core labor standards and fair economic trade policies.

Third, Global Unions perform a **facilitator function**. They facilitate the sharing of information and the coordination of collective action among their affiliates. In an age where it is common for a single multinational corporation to deal individually with unions from all over the world, information sharing can be a valuable resource for union negotiators. GUFs have been instrumental in creating World Company Councils, which regularly bring together trade union representatives from various subsidiaries within a multinational corporation. As of 2002, there were more than 20 undertakings of World Company Councils, or variations thereof (Rüb, 2002, pp. 4-11). Global Unions can be effective in finding means to bring different national unions together towards a common goal. Organizationally, most Global Unions are sub-divided into sectors or conferences

so that affiliates can better share information and coordinate their actions. For example, the IMF hosts multiple sectors within its organization including aerospace; automotive; electrical and electronics; iron, steel, and non-ferrous metals; mechanical engineering; and ship-building.

Global Unions also facilitate transnational collective action. On November 9, 2001, they organized a WTO Global Day of Action leading up to the WTO meeting in Qatar, which involved about 70 actions in 50 countries. They also organized May Day celebrations on May 1, 2003 involving about 90 actions in 70 countries.<sup>27</sup> Global Unions will plan, organize, and coordinate international campaigns or actions by sending campaign kits to their affiliates encouraging their mobilization and support. For example, EI sends out a campaign kit to their affiliates suggesting ways to integrate the Global Campaign for Education's yearly themes into local actions during a designated Global Week of Action.<sup>28</sup> However, it is worth noting that Global Unions do not play a significant role in engaging in direct industrial actions (e.g. strikes) nor do they negotiate collective bargaining agreements (with the exception of the ITF – see Lillie 2004). Such activities continue to be the responsibility of national trade unions. However, they will solicit support for unions that are engaged in industrial actions.

Fourth, Global Unions provide an **organizing function**. Global Unions help to organize workers by promoting workers' rights, providing support to national organizing campaigns, and in some cases, hiring organizers. The IUF has invested in global organizing. The IUF used donor money to establish the Nestle/Coca-Cola Global Project, which resulted in the hiring of ten organizers/coordinators in nine countries across four

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<sup>27</sup> Former ICFTU official, interview, April 27, 2005, The Hague, Netherlands

<sup>28</sup> EI official, interview, June 3, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

continents. An analysis of this project has found evidence of IUF membership growth in Russia, Korea, Philippines, Pakistan, Indonesia, India, Ukraine, and Romania (Garver *et al* 2007). UNI is also involved in global organizing. A UNI official stated that they sent full-time organizers to Bosnia following the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995 and they also hired full-time organizers in Poland to organize retail workers.<sup>29</sup> Of all the Global Unions, the ITF is most active in organizing. The ITF negotiates pay scales for seafarers on Flag of Convenience (FOC) ships, and ITF approved contracts cover about 85,000 seafarers (Lillie 2004, 49).

Global Unions also focus on organizing women and young workers. Recognizing the under-representation of women in unions, the Global Unions launched a campaign, “Women for Unions, Unions for Women” on March 8, 2002, which is also International Women’s Day. This three-year campaign was especially effective in the developing world, according to an ICFTU official. For instance, there was a 30 percent increase in unionized women in Mauritius as a result of this campaign.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, the Global Unions’ “Decent Work, Decent Life for Women” campaign draws attention to the highly exploitative workers (who are predominantly women) in export processing zones (EPZs). Generally, Global Unions have made strides in institutionalizing the role of women in their organizations (e.g. establishing standing Women’s Committees); however, women are still underrepresented and Global Unions have limited capacity in changing the policies and practices of their national affiliates (Reutter and Rütters 2002). Youth is another group targeted by Global Unions. The ICFTU initiated a Youth Campaign on April 16, 1999, and a Youth Committee comprised of representatives from the Global

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<sup>29</sup> UNI official, interview, June 6, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Brussels, Belgium; ICFTU headquarters, March 18, 2005

Unions works actively at the international level to educate youth about trade unions (*Trade Union World*, 1999, 24).

Finally, Global Unions perform a **capacity-building function**. They offer programs and training seminars for developing unions. In addition, they support research and publish reports that are useful for their affiliates. For example, the IUF established education programs to support union development in Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus by offering their expertise and procuring funding from donors (Croucher 2004). In 1998, PSI created the Public Services International Research Unit hosted at the University of Greenwich that conducts empirical research on privatization and globalization as well as maintains a data base on MNCs. Global Unions also support the Global Union Research Network (GURN) which is a forum to exchange research and knowledge within the international labor movement. Global Unions regularly publish reports on pertinent issues facing the international labor movement. Some of the ITUC's recent publications include *A Trade Union Guide to Globalization* (2004), *Achieving Gender Equality: A Trade Union Manual* (2008), and *Challenging the IFIs: Practical Information and Strategies for Trade Union Engagement with International Financial Institutions* (2008).

The five interrelated functions provided by Global Unions provide a substantive framework for global labor. Without Global Unions and its predecessors, the international labor movement would cease to exist per se. The day-to-day work of global labor is coordinated by Global Unions exercising the aforementioned functions. However, often their work is conducted in virtual anonymity from the workers that they are helping. As a result, a UNI official stated that it has been more difficult for national unions to justify affiliations to Global Unions because their members demand to know

what they are getting in return. He suggested that national unions needed to do a better job of educating their members about the importance of Global Unions.<sup>31</sup> Educating members about the functions of Global Unions could be used to justify the continued support of Global Unions.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

Global Unions are an essential component of global labor. Gallin argues that they “carry out in the most cost-effective and appropriate fashion necessary specialized tasks which national unions could only perform in an expensive and inefficient fashion” (2002, 243). However, Global Unions are not on the verge of seismic change. Windmuller concluded, “As a group, the autonomous ITSs [GUFs] will likely continue to be a useful but limited element among international labor organizations” (2000, 119). Stevis similarly concludes, “International labor organizations are not simply sleeping giants. They are fundamentally weak intersocietal confederations” (1998, 65). I agree; however, there are several reasons why Global Unions remain important to the future of global labor.

First, Global Unions offer an internationalist perspective that increases the legitimacy of global labor. The interests of national unions are largely shaped by their national environments, and national union leaders are accountable to their national memberships. The secretariats of Global Unions view the plight of workers among the matrix of international organizations and trends. In theory, they cannot privilege one group of workers over another. Global Unions must pay attention to their worldwide constituency, and the internationalist perspective of Global Unions helps give a voice to

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<sup>31</sup> UNI official, interview, June 7, 2005, Nyons, Switzerland

workers at the international level that otherwise would only be articulated by national unions. A UNI official described the difference between national and Global Unions. He said that national unions are like a fire brigade constantly responding to alarms and focusing on emergencies or things that have gone bad. On the other hand, Global Unions have a more general perspective that allows them to see the big picture, which he believes is quite an advantage.<sup>32</sup>

Second, Global Unions offer their affiliates access to an internationally diverse network of unions, which is democratic in principle. The democratic features of Global Unions cannot be discounted, especially at a time when scholars regularly critique the democratic deficit of global governance. Global Unions differ fundamentally from thousands of other non-state actors, including NGOs, and they achieve a level of legitimacy and accountability that is far beyond that of most NGOs. Gallin argues, “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the trade union movement remains the only democratically organized movement at the world level that is defining, explicitly or implicitly, the vision of society organized to serve the common welfare and based on the values of social justice, equality and cooperation” (2000, 8). Union members may not necessarily speak the same language but the lexicon of labor is universally understood. Global Unions by the very nature of their structure and organization force dialogue among unions. Union leaders rely on these contacts to further bilateral relationships and transnational campaigns.

Third, Global Unions are permanent organizations that work on a daily basis to fulfill the goals of their affiliates. They do not operate in a vacuum. Every few years Global Unions hold international congresses to assess the goals of their organizations, but

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<sup>32</sup> UNI official, interview, June 7, 2005, Nyon, Switzerland

the most important work that Global Unions do occurs in-between these congresses as they work to fulfill their mandates. An ICFTU official said that the logic of globalization calls upon national unions to act internationally, and he emphasized that “the highest form of trade union solidarity is permanent trade union organization.”<sup>33</sup> Global Unions provide a consistent voice to workers at the international level.

Finally, Global Unions are resourceful. Although Global Unions face financial constraints, many are turning to alternative sources of funding to further the goals of their organizations. In addition, further cooperation and pooling of resources are necessary steps to continue their work. The creation of the Council of Global Unions and possible future mergers are examples. Furthermore, Global Unions are exploring ways to become more involved in global civil society by working in partnership with NGOs. At its 2005 World Congress in Vienna, the IMF invited an Oxfam representative to be one of its keynote speakers, and an IMF official expressed the importance of building bridges with other groups in civil society.<sup>34</sup> Even Waterman, who is a regular critic of Global Unions, has noted that they are beginning to become more involved in “international social movement unionism” (2008, 258). A Global Union official stated that there has been an influx of younger people who have experience working with NGOs that have been hired to work for Global Unions.<sup>35</sup> A former ICFTU official who now works for an NGO explained that Global Unions have much to gain from working with NGOs, and he said that unions are considered a “prize” to have in transnational advocacy networks because they are generally considered the largest, most democratic element of civil society.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>34</sup> IMF official, interview, June 6, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>35</sup> Global Unions official, interview, July 18, 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>36</sup> Former ICFTU official, interview, April 27, 2005, The Hague, Netherlands

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Global Unions and global labor stand to benefit from increased resources and attention by their national affiliates. Gallin argues, “To strengthen the capacity of international trade organizations is therefore the most meaningful type of international activity any union can have today and certainly the only that reflects an internationalist agenda” (2002, 243). However, national unions will not strengthen Global Unions without first strengthening their own commitment to labor transnationalism. Once national unions recognize the importance and potential of transnational labor cooperation, there will be a spillover effect upwards. As labor transnationalism is incorporated into more union activities, there will be a greater demand for the type of functions that Global Unions are now performing. Gradually, this will help to increase the stature of Global Unions. Global labor is strengthened when national unions affiliate to Global Unions; expand their international contacts within their organizational structures; participate in transnational networks; and educate their members about globalization and the value of transnational labor cooperation. The future of Global Unions and global labor are ultimately dependent on the will and commitment of Global Unions’ affiliates.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**GOING GLOBAL: NATIONAL UNIONS AND**  
**LABOR TRANSNATIONALISM**

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I identify several factors that encourage unions to pursue labor transnationalism. I argue that when any one (or combination thereof) of three conditions is present, national unions are more likely to engage in labor transnationalism: 1) shrinking of national political opportunity structures; 2) opening of international political opportunity structures; and 3) adoption of social unionism, or social movement unionism, as a strategy for union revitalization. National industrial relations systems vary across countries, and while some unions enjoy relatively strong institutional support and power within their respective systems, others do not. For example, unions in coordinated market economies (CMEs) tend to have a stronger bargaining position than unions in liberal market economies (LMEs) (Hall and Soskice 2001; Thelen 2001). For unions in CMEs, political opportunity structures are readily available at the national level to pursue their goals (e.g. Germany's system of co-determination); however, for some unions, especially those in LMEs, they must seek alternative strategies to increase their relative strength. Thus, labor transnationalism is presented as an alternative strategy for unions to complement or augment their weakened institutional position within their national frameworks.

Unions can also be drawn to labor transnationalism by the opening of political opportunity structures at the international level. Unions that face multinational employers can benefit from transnational networking and information sharing among

unions in different countries. The international structure of multinational employers offers incentives for unions to cooperate with one another on strategic corporate campaigns. International framework agreements negotiated between MNCs and unions, including GUFs, are also a potential area of growing influence for unions at the international level. Furthermore, international regimes have developed around international labor standards to respond to neo-liberal economic policies promoted by international financial institutions. Many unions regularly support the activities of the ILO and Global Unions who lobby on behalf of workers at the international level for fair trade policies and the protection of workers' rights. Other non-state actors have sought the support of unions to collaborate on transnational advocacy campaigns, and global social movements provide opportunities for unions to become more engaged in global civil society.

Finally, regardless of political opportunity structures, some unions choose union revitalization strategies to reinvigorate labor movements. One such strategy is the adoption of social movement unionism or social unionism as a strategy for union renewal. Social movement unionism focuses on issues of concern to workers that extend beyond the workplace (Waterman 1998). Union revitalization strategies include international labor solidarity and coalition building (Frege and Kelly 2004). Dan Clawson (2007) argued that cross-border alliances are potentially part of an “upsurge” for unions in the United States that engage in social movement unionism. Social movement unionism emphasizes the importance of rank-and-file participation in social movements that often spillover into the global arena; therefore, labor transnationalism is a potential option for unions pursuing revitalization strategies.

On the other hand, I argue that three factors continue to limit labor transnationalism, even when the aforementioned conditions are present. These factors include 1) diminishing resources; 2) the autonomy of national unions; and 3) cultural barriers. Unions regularly pay lip service to international labor solidarity, but commitment to international activities is not a very high priority for most unions. In fact, many unions have scaled back their international activities. As we shall see in the next two chapters, the decline of union membership has forced unions to make tough choices about allocating scarce resources, and international activities are often targeted for cuts. For example, in the United States, pressure from rank-and-file members of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) resulted in the elimination of its international affairs department.<sup>37</sup>

Labor transnationalism is also inhibited by the fragmented and decentralized nature of global labor and the relative autonomy of national unions. There are numerous actors that collectively comprise the international labor movement, but national unions generally provide the resources necessary for effective labor transnationalism. Harrod and O'Brien characterize the international labor movement as "a collection of international trade union organizations attempting to coordinate national unions which are primarily local in intent and operations" (2002, 5). Representatives from transnational labor organizations (TLOs), including Global Union Federations (GUFs), regularly complain that they are at the mercy of national unions. In fact, protocol usually dictates that TLOs communicate directly through national unions in order to disseminate information about transnational campaigns to the rank-and-file (Moody 1997). One labor scholar has described national unions as "gatekeepers" (Waterman 2001). Prominent

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<sup>37</sup> LIUNA official, interview, July 18, 2007, Washington, D.C.

international labor historians have concluded that TLOs have traditionally been politically weak and dependent on national unions (Lorwin 1953; Windmuller 1980). Unions have been reluctant to transfer significant competencies to TLOs and often prefer to maintain direct control over their international activities.

Finally, cultural barriers continue to stand in the way of labor transnationalism. Although there are vast union networks that connect workers from all over the world, these networks are often limited to the union elite, and misunderstandings and prejudices against workers worldwide remain. During times of economic recession, high unemployment, and the outsourcing of jobs, workers from other countries are likely to be viewed as potential foes rather than friends. Xenophobia is not uncommon among workers. Additionally, language barriers often prevent workers from meaningful dialogue with one another. In sum, there are several formidable obstacles to labor transnationalism that persist and limit the potential impact of global labor at the international level.

Nevertheless, the future of organized labor in the global economy has been linked to unions' ability to "go global" (Harrod and O'Brien 2002; Bronfenbrenner 2007). However, international labor solidarity has been an elusive goal of the international labor movement. Activists sing the virtues of solidarity, but in reality, the majority of the international workforce, which the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates to be 2.9 billion workers, is unorganized (ILO 2006). Competition among working class people is likely to intensify worldwide as governments facilitate the mobility of capital investment. Workers face far greater restrictions when it comes to their mobility. For them, moving from one country to another in pursuit of employment is not a practical

option. National unions work within these geo-political boundaries to improve the conditions of workers in national industrial relations systems that vary from country to country. As a result, the international labor movement tends to be subordinate to the interests of national unions, and transnational labor cooperation is largely dependent on the transnational activities of national unions. Therefore, I focus on national unions as my level of analysis.

I define labor transnationalism as the transnational activities of union members and their organizations, including campaigns, coalitions and/or networks, union development, and the promotion of workers' rights. Understanding the conditions under which unions pursue labor transnationalism will provide a more accurate theoretical framework to analyze how globalization affects organized labor. Finally, I characterize recent trends whereby unions are moving beyond traditional approaches to labor transnationalism and proactively adapting to globalization as complex labor transnationalism. Complex labor transnationalism is a multi-dimensional approach to incorporating transnational strategies at various levels and areas of union governance.

### **Conditions for Labor Transnationalism**

The end of the Cold War not only freed the world from the geo-political rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union, but it ended a primary obstacle to a more unified international labor movement (Ashwin 2000). During the Cold War, these divisions were manifested in competing rival union camps. Communist bloc unions essentially controlled the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), while the ICFTU represented the “free” and “independent” trade union movement dominated by Western European and North American unions. In the post-Cold War, several former communist

unions abandoned the WFTU and affiliated with the ICFTU. There was increased optimism that organized labor could respond more effectively to the neo-liberal economic policies that were being asserted throughout the world (O'Brien 2000b). The former International Trade Secretariats (ITSS) changed their names to Global Union Federations (GUFs) in 2002, and the ICFTU merged with another rival, the World Confederation of Labor (WCL), to form the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) in 2006. On paper, the ITUC became the most representative TLO in the history of the international labor movement. An era of new international labor solidarity and increased labor cooperation was expected to ensue. However, the results have fallen short of expectations.

Despite the end of the Cold War and the fanfare associated with the creation of the ITUC (mainly limited to labor circles), global labor has not become a social force that has drawn much attention in part due to its continued fragmented and decentralized structure. Noting the powerful international organizations that have arisen to protect the interests of businesses and finance capital, Kathleen Newland stated, "it remains unclear who looks out for the workers at the sharp end of global restructuring" (1999, 59). After its creation, the ITUC described current solidarity support programs for trade unions as "fragmented, without global orientation, committed to an agenda of their own" (Traub-Merz and Eckl 2007). Paul Garver *et al* pointed out that "the actual practice of global labor organizing remains sparse and unsystematic" (2007, 238). Even labor elites lament global labor's shortcomings. Vic Thorpe, a former GUF general secretary, warned, "We need to become a respected source of new ideas, not the neglected guardians of a glorious past" (1999, 225). Another former GUF general secretary, Dan Gallin, noted, "Organized

labor exists, nationally and internationally, and it may even be considered a global social force. But the gap between the reality of its organization and strength and its potential remains immense” (2002, 235).

The limitations of international labor solidarity should not be surprising. It is an ideal that is incompatible with the realities faced by national and sub-national unions. Unions across the world are struggling to adapt to the economic liberalization that was ushered in after the collapse of the Cold War. The retreat of the state (Strange 1996) threatened well-established tripartite relationships that depended on the cooperation of governments, labor, and capital. Particularly in industrialized countries, the post-war “social contract” between workers and governments, which sought the goal of full employment, fell apart (Kapstein 1996). The embedded liberalism of the post-war years unraveled as traditional safeguards guaranteed by governments were jeopardized. Relationships with political parties that had traditionally aligned with unions could no longer be taken for granted. The effect of globalization on unions has led many to conclude that organized labor is incompatible with the flexibility and mobility of global markets (Wachter 2003; Steingart 2008). The weakening of national labor movements serves as proof to organized labor naysayers that their decline is inevitable (Fiorito 2007). However, a more in-depth analysis of the transnational activities of national unions suggests that such dismal forecasts are premature.

Although international labor solidarity has not been achieved on a grand scale, transnational labor cooperation endures. In fact, a growing literature on labor transnationalism focuses on organized labor’s successful transnational campaigns (Gordon and Turner 2000; Armbruster-Sandoval 2005; Bronfenbrenner 2007). Herod

refuted the notion that organized labor is a victim of globalization and asserted that “workers have often challenged at the global scale the actions of transnational corporations” (1997, 192). However, an important question that is often overlooked in the literature is the conditions that encourage transnational labor cooperation. I draw upon several disciplines – international relations, sociology, and comparative labor studies – to offer a general overview of these conditions.

### *Shrinking National Political Opportunity Structures*

Most of the recent transnational actor literature in international relations tends to focus on international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998), but this literature traces its roots to earlier contributions that noted the growing importance of non-state actors (Keohane and Nye 1971, 1977). As a result, international relations scholars began to pay more attention to the effect that domestic structures have on international relations (Katzenstein 1978; Risse-Kappen 1995). The emphasis on domestic structures has also been used by social movement theorists to explain the emergence and development of social movements. Sidney Tarrow argued that the presence of political opportunity structures can result in collective action among non-state actors. He defined the political opportunity structure as “consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions that either encourage or discourage people from using collective action” (Tarrow 1994, 18). Keck and Sikkink used the concept of domestic political opportunity structures to explain the effectiveness of transnational advocacy networks (1998). They argued that when domestic opportunity structures were closed activists would use the “boomerang effect” to work with transnational activists to apply political leverage on domestic actors. In a

later work, Sikkink (2004) defined domestic opportunity structures as the extent to which domestic political institutions are open or closed to domestic social movements or NGO influence.

National political opportunity structures are a key explanatory variable in explaining transnational collective action. Several studies have used social movement theory to explain the success or failure of transnational labor campaigns (Stillerman 2003; Armbruster-Sandoval 2003). Tarrow defines transnational activists as “people and groups who are rooted in specific national contexts, but who engage in contentious political activities that involve them in transnational networks of contacts and conflicts” (2005, 29). Unions are non-state actors committed to the parochial interests of their members and the continued survivability of their institutions. The value of social movement theory is its focus on the domestic conditions that either impede or facilitate unions’ goals. Unions that are faced with shrinking national opportunity structures will be more likely to consider labor transnationalism as an option to achieve their goals. Burgoon and Jacoby (2004) characterize this as the “push” effect.

For example, American unions have committed considerable resources towards organizing. To that end, they are lobbying Congress and the White House to legislate national labor law reform that will aid in this goal. Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) will make it easier for workers to form unions (through majority card check rather than union elections). However, anti-union forces resist this campaign and its outcome remains uncertain. Recognizing the hostile national political environment, in 2007, the AFL-CIO filed a complaint with the ILO’s Committee on Freedom of Association citing the Bush’s National Labor Relations Board as being too restrictive on

workers' right to unionize. AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, said, "Under Bush, America's labor board has so failed our nation's workers that we must now turn to the world's international watchdogs to monitor and intervene" (Parks 2007a). A concurrent transnational strategy evolved from the exasperation felt by many unions in the United States. In this case, labor transnationalism was a response to shrinking national political opportunity structures.

The domestic conditions of unions vary considerably across the globe, but they remain an important factor shaping the options available to unions. The degree to which unions have been institutionalized into their national economy can affect the behavior of unions. Comparative labor studies have shown that differences in industrial relations systems yield different types of priorities and strategies for unions. For example, in Germany, unions are generally treated as "social partners" under an institutional arrangement called co-determination. German unions have institutional rights that have resulted in high percentages of workers covered under collective bargaining agreements. On the other hand, unions in the United States generally face a more adversarial relationship with employers. U.S. labor law has not helped unions to achieve high levels of collective bargaining coverage, and therefore, U.S. unions tend to place more emphasis on organizing than their German counterparts (Baccaro, Hamann, and Turner 2003). This suggests that labor transnationalism is not the magic bullet to help revive labor movements across the world, but its application is likely to be attributed to a domestic environment that no longer satisfies the goals of a national union.

In *Towards a Theory of Trade Union Internationalism*, Logue explored the paradox of the organized working class as the "champions of internationalism" (1980, 7).

He sought to understand why internationalism was given such priority among a segment of the population that has traditionally been ill-informed and uninterested in international affairs. Logue argued that initially internationalism was a necessary and rational function of unions. Early journeymen traveled internationally as part of their training and in search of work, and the guilds and early unions encouraged such practices by reciprocating membership benefits among the different trade unions. Unions also worked hard internationally to prevent strikebreakers from being imported from neighboring countries. However, over time as borders became tightened and controlled politically, unions focused more on advancing their members' interests through local and national mediums. Logue concluded that "the greater the degree of trade union control over its national environment, the less likely it is to undertake international activity to achieve its members' goals" (1980, 11). For Logue, the institutionalization of national industrial relations systems resulted in a significant decrease in the quality and extent of labor transnationalism. Logically, his argument suggests that when unions begin to lose control over their national environment, then labor transnationalism once again becomes a rational option.

The paradox of the international labor movement is the extent to which it is nationally oriented. Arguably, the most important function that unions serve is economic (collective bargaining agent), and although there was optimism in the early 1970s that transnational collective bargaining was possible (Cox 1971; Levinson 1972), it is unlikely in today's global economy. Therefore, the national environment will continue to be the main venue of union activity, but this venue is dynamic. Changes in national industrial relations systems and the actors involved require that unions constantly reassess their

strategies. Labor transnationalism need not be an end for unions to achieve, but it can be selectively incorporated into their programmatic schemes when national strategies are simply not enough.

### *Opening of International Political Opportunity Structures*

Labor transnationalism by national unions is also facilitated by the increasing availability of international political opportunity structures. Sikkink defines international opportunity structure as “the degree of openness of international institutions to the participation of transnational NGOs, networks, and coalitions” (2004, 156). International political opportunity structures facilitate strategies of labor transnationalism by unions. These opportunities are manifested in corporate campaigns against multinational corporations, international labor standards regimes, networks of transnational labor organizations and activists, and global governance. The opening of international political opportunity structures offer incentives for national unions to engage in labor transnationalism when they perceive such actions will lead to direct or latent benefits for their members.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) have been able to take advantage of the global division of labor, and at times, their flexibility has put national unions on the defensive. Research in the United States has shown that employers commonly threaten to shutdown or move their operations in response to organizing campaigns (Bronfenbrenner 1997). Concerns that MNCs would cause states to compete in the “race to the bottom” have resulted in attempts to hold MNCs more accountable to core labor standards. International institutions have addressed some of these concerns. For example, the ILO

and the OECD respectively passed the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy in 1976 and the Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises in 1977. Under pressure from national unions and NGOs, several MNCs created internal corporate codes of conduct. In 1991, Levi Strauss became one of the first MNCs to publish a corporate code of conduct acknowledging responsibility for the workers in its production chain (Braun and Gearhart 2004). More recently, “multi-stakeholder” codes of conduct have been established to monitor and verify corporate social responsibility. These include the Fair Labor Association (FLA), Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), Social Accountability International (SAI), and the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) (Compa 2008).

Multinational corporations and their subsidiaries create opportunities for transnational labor cooperation. In effect, the international structure of MNCs has offered more “pressure points” for unions to exploit. Sharing a common employer has prompted many unions to establish international relationships with one another. For example, in 1997 unions in the United States and Europe organized a World Action Day against the United Parcel Services (UPS), which helped to end a two-week strike by the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (Mazur 2000). Research on strategic corporate campaigns has highlighted the sophisticated and calculated methods that can be used by national unions to be successful against global firms (Juravitch 2007). In December 2007, the AFL-CIO and the Global Unions Council hosted a conference, *Going Global: Organizing, Recognition and Union Rights*, where over 200 union leaders from 63 countries met to discuss global union strategies (Parks 2007b).

The development of an international labor standards regime is another way in which national unions will be drawn towards labor transnationalism. Several scholars have called for increased inter-disciplinary research on industrial relations and international relations (Haworth and Hughes 2002). Stephen Krasner defined regimes as “the implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (1983, 2). An international regime has emerged around core international labor standards (Hughes 2002). The ILO has produced almost 200 ILO conventions (Langille 2001). An international labor standards regime offers a conduit for national unions to work with international institutions, including the ILO, the WTO, the United Nations, and regional economic organizations. Transnational campaigns to include social clauses in international free trade agreements have also been organized by national unions and TLOs (van Roozendaal 2002).

The passage of the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, the United States, and Canada was accompanied with a side agreement on labor standards. The North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC) established a procedural framework to address labor violations of participant countries. NAALC has been criticized because it lacks an enforcement mechanism (Carr 1999). However, despite its shortcomings, NAFTA created political opportunity structures that have resulted in the emergence of labor transnationalism among North American unions (Stillerman 2003). Kay argues that it “stimulated political mobilization” and “created nascent institutions through which labor activists could build transnational relationships” (2005, 718).

International Framework Agreements (IFAs) are another source of emerging international political opportunity structures. IFAs are “agreements on minimum labor standards negotiated between GUFs and multinational employers” and “include as a minimum freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and provide unions with formalized representation at the corporate level of the enterprise (Riisgaard 2005, 709). Although these agreements fall short of transnational collective bargaining, they are explicit acknowledgments of the social responsibilities of corporations. Research on IFAs has shown that “freedom of association and collective bargaining are covered in more than 95 percent of IFAs, forced labor is covered more than 90 percent, employment discrimination in about 85 percent, and child labor in more than 75 percent (Stavis and Boswell 2008, 126). National unions, predominantly in Europe, have utilized these agreements as leverage for their own collective bargaining purposes.

In 2002, the ICFTU, the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) of the OECD, and GUFs launched a Global Unions platform from which to collaborate on joint initiatives and information sharing. Although TLOs are generally weak, Global Unions provide valuable functions for national unions that affiliate to them (see Chapter 3). Affiliation to Global Unions and other regional TLOs, including the ETUC and European Industry Federations (EIFs), provide an expansive network of unions. Union leaders rely on these networks as a means to build trust among other unions that can potentially result in greater transnational cooperation.<sup>38</sup> Global Unions have formal relationships with other international institutions that can be tapped into by national unions as well. For example, the ICFTU (now the ITUC) has consultative status with the UN system, the

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<sup>38</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO (Gordon 2000). In addition, the ITUC plays an important role in coordinating the activities of the Workers Group within the ILO.

The impetus for labor transnationalism does not necessarily originate at the national and/or sub-national level. Burgoon and Jacoby argued that international institutions have the effect of “pulling” national unions into the international arena (2004). For example, the European labor movement and the ETUC increased its competencies within the EU from the “top down” relying on “borrow resources” from European institutions (Martin and Ross 2001). In other words, the ETUC was not a typical member-driven organization that resulted from a European labor “movement” per se. Turner (1996) explained that the structures of European representation were in place before any type of European action among the rank and file. Nevertheless, national unions enjoy greater influence in the EU as a result. In 1994, an EU directive established European Works Councils (EWCs) for companies with 1,000 employees or more, including at least 150 employees in two or more member states. This was just another example of national unions and workers being drawn together at the European level to cooperate.

The growth of international organizations and global governance facilitate opportunities for labor transnationalism. National unions are presented with options that can potentially enhance their positions nationally. Participation in transnational networks is tempting for national unions because it reduces transaction costs, facilitates transnational collective action and information sharing, and cultivates relationships among unions.

### *Adoption of a Social Union Paradigm*

The adoption of social unionism, or social movement unionism, as a union renewal strategy is the third condition that gives national unions incentive to engage in labor transnationalism. Social unionism is a term used to describe the broader role that is conceived by unions. Social unionism has become an important part of union renewal strategies (Voss and Sherman 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004). Many unions, particularly in the United States, focus on a business union model, whereby the union's primary purpose is to improve the terms and conditions of employment for their members – the so-called “bread and butter” issues. Social unionism, on the other hand, posits that unions have a broader mandate that extends beyond the workplace. Social unionism encourages alliance building with other social movements, including the global justice movement (Nissen 2003). Hurd, Milkman, and Turner cited international solidarity as one of several components of social unionism in the United States that has contributed to the “revival” of the American labor movement (2003). In a major study of unions in six countries, Frege and Kelly identified international union action as one of six revitalization strategies (2004). Frundt argues, “Social-movement unions are the type most adept at achieving international solidarity and collaborative strategy” (2005, 36).

Choosing a social union model paradigm is a strategic choice made by a union. Often this choice is made within the context of breathing new life into the organization. One of the tenets of social unionism is an emphasis on rank-and-file participation, and unions are exploring new ways to break the mold of Michel's iron law of oligarchy (Voss and Sherman 2000). In case studies of union organizing at home and abroad, Turner found that rank-and-file participation was a “necessary ingredient” for the revitalization

of unions (1998, 134). Improvements in communications and information technology have made transnational issues more accessible to the rank-and-file (Lee 1997).

*Labourstart* offers an international online news service for workers and has recently established *UnionBook*, a social networking site for union members. Access to information about labor movements in different parts of the world can help facilitate and promote transnational cooperation in response to common problems.

The Battle of Seattle in 1999 was a watershed event for the revival of social unionism. It demonstrated the possibilities of concerted transnational action. In fact, several scholars have identified new forms of labor transnationalism that embody social unionism. Global social movement unionism (GSMU) was described by Lambert and Webster as “when unions move beyond their traditional workplace boundaries to form alliances with other civil society movements within the nation state, whilst at the same time creating a new global union form” (2001, 350). Lambert and Webster argue that GSMU is an alternative approach to “old” labor internationalism, particularly among unions from the Global South. Munck argues that the international labor movement is undergoing a new “Great Transformation.” He concluded, “A new, more internationalist, as well as objectively ‘globalized,’ labor movement is emerging with a strong social movement or community orientation” (2002, 174). The increased presence of unions at the annual World Social Forum is further evidence that more unions are adopting a social union paradigm.

### **Factors that Discourage Labor Transnationalism**

Although the conditions for labor transnationalism may be increasingly present, not all unions enthusiastically embrace it. The rhetoric of international labor solidarity is often at odds with the actions of national unions. Harvie Ramsay argues that the incentives for labor transnationalism may have grown but the capacities to do so are problematic (1999). In this section, I identify three factors that discourage labor transnationalism: 1) diminishing resources; 2) the autonomy of national unions; and 3) cultural barriers.

#### *Lean Times for Unions*

Unions rely on union dues for their operating budgets. Rank-and-file members are critical to the financial well being of unions, and when membership densities decline, union budgets are affected, often resulting in layoffs and economic restructuring. After several unions split from the AFL-CIO in 2005 to form the Change to Win Federation (CtW), the AFL-CIO temporarily abolished its International Affairs department.<sup>39</sup> In the United States, Fiorito reports, “Union membership stood at approximately 20.1 million in 1980, and declined to 15.7 million in 2005,” while “employment rose from 87.5 million to 125.9 million” (2007, 43). Numerous studies have documented the downward spiral of union membership in the United States (Kaufman 2004; Chaison 2006). The power and influence of European unions have declined as well (Fuller 2005). In a study of the union statistics of 24 OECD countries, Visser (2006) found that 20 of 24 countries registered declining union density rates from 1970 to 2002.

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<sup>39</sup> AFL-CIO official, interview, August 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

In principle, labor transnationalism makes logical sense in a globalizing economy, but if the gains of doing so are not immediately evident, then there are pressures to cut back. Unions are democratic organizations, and union leaders are often forced by their membership to curb spending. In many instances, unions have been put on the defensive. One union official bluntly stated, “The problem is that we are fighting for our survival so that when you are looking down the barrel of a gun, your first reaction is to save yourself...and save others later. And I really think honestly that’s really what we’re looking at right now is our survival.”<sup>40</sup> In 1996, after Andy Stern was elected president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), he re-organized union priorities and abolished the international affairs department in order to devote more resources towards union growth and organizing.<sup>41</sup> The off shoring and outsourcing of union jobs will cause some workers to question the benefits of labor transnationalism, especially when these benefits are not immediately tangible to the rank-and-file.

### *Turf Wars and Union Autonomy*

The autonomy of national unions has been jealously guarded by union elites, and transnational cooperation has its limits. Most constitutions of the TLOs include clauses that specifically recognize the autonomy of their affiliates. Protocol usually dictates that national unions control access to their members when dealing with TLOs. Transnational cooperation is further impeded by intra-national turf wars. For example, the CtW, which represents six million workers in the United States, has applied for membership but has

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<sup>40</sup> SMWIA official, interview, August 9, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>41</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

not been admitted into the ITUC, presumably blocked by its rival, the AFL-CIO.<sup>42</sup> In another case, the UNITE side of UNITE-HERE, a large textile and hotel and restaurant workers union in the United States that was created as a result of a merger in 2004, has voted to unmerge from the union over differences among the union's leadership (Meyerson 2009). Internal union politics have often stood in the way of greater cooperation both inside and outside national labor movements.

Mergers between national unions have been a necessary response to diminishing resources (Chaison 1996). However, many union leaders have resisted mergers. Prior to disaffiliating with the AFL-CIO, Stern called for radical restructuring of the number of AFL-CIO affiliates from 65 to approximately 20, but his plea was ignored (Stern 2006). In the United States, there are no less than four unions representing postal workers (American Postal Workers Union, National Association of Letter Carriers, National Postal Mail Handlers Union, and the National Rural Letter Carriers' Association)! When questioned about the possibility of a merger, one of the presidents of the aforementioned postal unions said that the others are too proud and stubborn to merge and he doubted if he would ever live to see the day.<sup>43</sup>

Even in Europe, where one would expect higher levels of transnational labor cooperation, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the trade union arm of the European Union (EU), has proven to be weak. Unions in Europe function primarily within their national borders, and the convergence of national economies has not resulted in the convergence of labor relations systems (Slomp 2000). Martin and Ross explained, "...union movements have been thoroughly embedded in the institutional structures of

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<sup>42</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>43</sup> APWA official, interview, July 19, 2007, Washington, D.C.

national political economies” (2001, 53). Despite unprecedented economic integration within the EU, unions in Europe remain decentralized and hesitate to pursue strategies that would consolidate trade union power at the European level. Wolfgang Schroeder and Rainer Weinert predicted, “As European trade unions refuse to hand over any relevant competencies to or make any commitment to action at the European regulatory level, such weak structures will probably determine the ‘design’ of EU institutions for the foreseeable future” (2004, 214).

Additionally, a European Works Councils (EWCs) directive that was passed by the European Union in 1994 has failed to significantly improve transnational cooperation among European unions. In theory, participation in EWCs should improve transnational relationships between unions and employers possibly laying the groundwork for European-level collective bargaining. However, in practice, national employers and national unions have hindered the effectiveness of EWCs. In a case study of eight Swedish-based EWCs, Tony Huzzard and Peter Docherty concluded, “Existing national practices, it seems, are hurting the evolution of a convergent, participative EWC model rather than promoting it” (2005, 565). The authors found that national unions, particularly those from countries where they enjoyed a strong institutional voice, were skeptical of the utility of EWCs. In the case of Swedish unions, there was “apprehension that transnational bargaining may result in a leveling down for employees in Sweden rather than a leveling up for their European colleagues” (2005, 563).

Unions in the United States have also been reluctant to confer significant power to TLOs. Historically, unions in the United States have vacillated in their support of TLOs. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) was uncomfortable with the socialist rhetoric

of European unions and was absent from the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which was re-constituted following World War I, from 1919 to 1937. During the Cold War, the AFL-CIO disaffiliated from the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which it had helped to establish, from 1969 to 1984 because the ICFTU did not take a hard line stance against communist unions. Rather than work closely with the ICFTU in union development in the Third World, the AFL-CIO infamously established trade union institutes in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, which were outside the jurisdiction of the ICFTU. Although US unions have a long history of labor internationalism, their activities tend to be driven and controlled by national unions.

National labor practices vary internationally, and at times, these differences can clash when unions cooperate internationally. Nathan Lillie and Miguel Martinez Lucio clarified that labor internationalism “is not merely national labor movements extending their strategies into some vague and pre-constituted ‘international’ arena, but rather involves the extension (for better or worse) of specific practices, institutions, and patterns of national influence into international contexts, regardless of the internationalist rhetoric of many trade unions” (2004, 159). They concluded, “Different national institutions and strategies of industrial relations, as well as cultures, may compete in the shaping of the new internationalism” (2004, 177). Unions are likely to cling to practices that are more familiar to them further impeding cooperation. Burgoon and Jacoby (2004) characterized the qualitatively different approaches to labor transnationalism by American and European unions as “patch-work” solidarity.

### *Local Prejudices*

The solidarity of workers cannot be taken for granted. Richard Hyman states that solidarity “implies the perception of commonalities of interest and purpose which extend, but do not abolish, consciousness of distinct and particularistic circumstances” (2001, 170). However, there is much that divides workers. The global division of labor has pitted workers in Mexico against workers in Vietnam. Overcoming these divisions has not proven easy, especially when cultural differences are introduced. A common worker identity competes with a multitude of others. Patriotism or nationalism is just one of many obstacles to worker solidarity (Silverman 1999). The world largely operates on an interstate playing field, and geo-politics often stands in the way of greater cooperation. The exclusion of the All China Federation of Trade Unions from the ITUC is just one example. Xenophobia can be another obstacle to cooperation, especially during tough economic times, as workers look for scapegoats to account for rising unemployment and increased competition for jobs (Eder 2002).

On a practical level, language and cultural differences prevent the free flow exchange of ideas among unions from different countries (Ross 2000). In some cases, language can create power hierarchies in multi-linguistic meetings. Even in Europe, the solidarity of workers in EWCs have been undermined by cultural and language differences. Stirling and Tully studied the dynamics of EWC meetings and noted “language and culture are key instruments of power and control which can include or exclude individuals and groups within the forum” (2004, 87). Another study found that cultural competitiveness pervades EWC meetings (Miller 1999).

Cleavages between unions from the Global North and Global South have also presented challenges for greater transnational solidarity. The dominance of North American and European unions in TLOs has not gone unnoticed. The headquarters of all of the Global Unions are based in Europe, and the staff and secretary-generals are predominantly European. The campaign to include social clauses in free trade agreements has been driven by Global North unions, but some Global South unions are suspicious of the ulterior motives of Global North unions, which some argue are grounded in preserving jobs rather than promoting workers' rights (Anner 2007). Resentment and distrust is still harbored by some Global South unions over the collusion of American unions with the anti-communist and interventionist foreign policy of the United States during the Cold War (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2006). Some unions from the Global South express frustration that they are treated as inferior to their northern counterparts (Gumbrell-McCormick 2004).

In sum, there are many obstacles that detract from labor transnationalism. However, these obstacles are not new to the labor movement. National unions have had to contend with substantive differences within their respective national labor movements. Overcoming these differences is not insurmountable, but it requires political will and creativity on the part of unions to explore ways to overcome their differences, especially as incentives for labor transnationalism increase.

### **Complex Labor Transnationalism**

Traditionally, labor internationalism was viewed as the bastion for union elites. Union elites attended international conferences in foreign countries under the guise of labor internationalism. Such international junkets promoted the prestige of union leaders

and the reputation of unions. Logue (1980) predicted that the quantity of international contacts among unions would increase, but the quality of these contacts would remain low. To a certain extent, this remains true today. Generally, union elites are the ones who attend international conferences and deal with “international affairs.” However, the scope of international affairs has bled into other areas of union competencies, and it is no longer an exclusive domain. Today, for some unions, labor internationalism has given way to a more complex form of labor transnationalism.

Complex labor transnationalism is the selective incorporation of labor transnationalism into union strategies at all levels. It is based on three underlying assumptions. First, transnational relationships in formal or informal networks can result in latent benefits for unions. Establishing and/or maintaining contacts with workers in other countries help to build foundations of trust among unions, and several unions rely on these networks to address problems of mutual concern. Second, transnational activities supplement rather than replace national activities. The international labor movement is not poised for a radical overhaul of the way national unions conduct business. Employers and unions resist transnational collective bargaining, but transnational strategies can be used concurrently in pursuit of unions’ goals. Third, transnational activities will aid in the goal of increasing the political, economic, and social standing of union members. Unions will not devote scarce resources to labor transnationalism unless they perceive it to be in their best interests.

Evidence of complex labor transnationalism is harder to measure qualitatively, because it can be employed in a number of different areas. For example, although the SEIU abolished its international affairs department in 1996, in 2004, the Department of

Global Organizing Partnerships was created as one facet of SEIU's broader organizing program.<sup>44</sup> The Communication Workers of America (CWA) never replaced their director of international affairs after he died in 2000, but it continues to be active with transnational issues.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, in some cases, it may appear that unions have turned their back on labor transnationalism when in fact they have incorporated elements of it into their day-to-day strategies.

Labor transnationalism can be employed in a number of different ways that do not necessarily require a dedicated staff to labor transnationalism. For example, local unions bargaining with a multinational employer will establish contacts with unions in employer's host countries to share information or to lobby on their behalf.<sup>46</sup> Global issues, such as child labor, sweatshops, environmental hazards, and violations of workers' rights, are regularly addressed by union membership conventions. Global trade has caused unions to re-think their approach to national trade policies, and political departments devote resources to the promotion of fair trade. On the social front, there is more pressure on unions to participate in social movements.

Complex labor transnationalism is a dynamic and process driven response to the globalization of capital at all levels of union governance. Labor transnationalism need not come at the expense of national priorities and strategies. However, in order to sustain itself, more education of the global big picture will be required at all levels of union governance – not just the upper echelon.

The future of the international labor movement will depend on national unions' ability to adapt to the blurring of lines between national and international systems.

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<sup>44</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>45</sup> CWA official, interview, August 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>46</sup> UFCW official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Hyman contemplated the challenges faced by unions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “In the third century of trade union internationalism, the challenges which are faced are perhaps greater than ever, but there is a growing awareness that old recipes for action are inadequate and that new possibilities can be grasped. Thoughtful trade unionists have come to recognize that playing safe is the most risky strategy. The present is either the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end” (2002, 14). Old labor internationalism has become an outdated approach to addressing transnational issues. When asked about labor internationalism, a union official responded, “To me, it seems like an old fashion, romantic word.”<sup>47</sup> Complex labor transnationalism more accurately characterizes the way in which some unions are transitioning to a dynamic economic environment, but challenges remain. The next chapter analyzes complex labor transnationalism in the context of the U.S. labor movement.

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<sup>47</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

## CHAPTER 5

### GOING GLOBAL? US UNIONS AS A CASE STUDY

“One of our tasks as trade unions is to defend working people and to advance workers’ conditions, but that’s increasingly difficult within the confines of national boundaries. It seems we’re no longer capable of fully confronting and negotiating with these global companies unless we ourselves are organized globally.”- Leo W. Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers (2007)

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I engage in an empirical study seeking to answer three questions about the nature of labor transnationalism among unions in the United States. First, are unions affiliated to Global Union Federations (GUFs), formerly known as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs)? Second, are unions educating their rank-and-file membership about global issues and the potential value of transnational labor cooperation? Third, do unions staff a dedicated department or director of international affairs? If the future of unions is in fact “global,” then I should see evidence that unions are engaged in transnational activities. My research relies on interviews conducted with national union leaders, analysis of union websites and primary documents, and secondary sources.

The results of my research show the record of labor transnationalism in the United States is mixed. On one hand, despite the rhetoric of international solidarity, there is not a formative transformation of the US labor movement towards a “global union” model. On the other hand, there is some evidence that labor transnationalism is being incorporated at various areas of union governance. I argue that complex labor transnationalism best characterizes the attempt by some unions in the United States to adapt to the changing contours of the economic landscape.

Complex labor transnationalism is the strategic incorporation of labor transnationalism at various areas of union activities. It is a response to the dynamic conditions that unions are facing under globalization. I disaggregate the activities of complex labor transnationalism into six types: communicative transnationalism, political transnationalism, steward transnationalism, protest transnationalism, collaborative transnationalism, and institutional transnationalism. The various types of transnational activities associated with complex labor transnationalism demonstrate that unions have several options when it comes to labor transnationalism.

In principle, unions in the United States generally agree that more needs to be done in order to effectively respond to the globalization of capital, but there are significant obstacles that stand in the way. A Service Employees International Union (SEIU) official put it bluntly when she said that “capital spreads across borders easily and the unions are still almost completely national and it’s just a bad fit.”<sup>48</sup> Operating within the national confines of industrial relations, while simultaneously working towards global union solidarity epitomizes the contradiction of the international labor movement. Labor transnationalism in the United States can be a complicated endeavor.

### **Organized Labor in the United States**

The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) reports that despite marginal increases in union density in the past two years, union density in the United States remains low (12.4%) compared to a quarter century ago (20.1%). In the private sector, union density is even lower (7.6%). The strike, a formidable tactic used by unions to gain leverage in collective bargaining negotiations, is used less often by unions, and the

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<sup>48</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

percentage of workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement has also declined significantly. Given the state of unions in the United States, where do unions go from here? A prominent labor scholar argues, “Global unions are the future” (Bronfenbrenner 2007). In December 2007, the AFL-CIO and the Council of Global Unions hosted a historic gathering of union leaders to discuss global organizing strategies. AFL-CIO President John Sweeny remarked, “In an age of rampant global corporate outlaws, the world’s workers must forge new alliances to defend their democratic freedom to come together in unions to improve their lives” (AFL-CIO 2007).

Incentives for unions to “go global” are increasing. Cooke argues, “Since the early 1980s there has been an eightfold increase in the number of multinational corporations (MNCs) and a 12-fold increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) stock” (2005, 283). Transnational labor cooperation could potentially help unions elevate their role in the global economy, but in general, organized labor has been slow to adapt. Guy Ryder, who is the general secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), admitted, “We haven’t been reacting quickly enough” (Meyerson 2007, A29).

During the Cold War, the “cold war warriors” in the U.S. labor movement spent considerable resources on international affairs, and unions partnered with the government to aggressively fight communism abroad by exporting a business union model to developing unions (Scipes 2000). However, some argue that the labor internationalism of the Cold War years undermined the independence and reputation of the U.S. labor movement (Sims 1992; Shorrock 2003). Since then, there has been renewed interest in organizing new workers. In 1995, John Sweeny won the first contested presidential election in AFL-CIO history on a New Voice slate, and the new leadership focused its

priorities on organizing (Fantasia and Voss 2004). In addition, the AFL-CIO shifted its international programs toward an “anti-neoliberal and anti-corporate agenda” and promoted the inclusion of international workers’ rights in free trade agreements (Robinson 2002, 127). Considering that American unions operate in a liberal market economy (LME) and do not enjoy the relative institutional strength as unions in coordinated market economies (CMEs) (Thelen 2001), one would suspect that unions in the United States are being “pushed” or “pulled” towards the global arena. The next section explores whether or not there is evidence to that effect.

### **Preliminary Analysis of Labor Transnationalism**

For my research, I focused on 65 unions headquartered in the United States. Unlike Germany, which has eight national unions affiliated to its national union federation, there are 56 unions affiliated to the AFL-CIO, which represents about 11 million workers in the United States. An additional 6 million workers are represented by seven unions that are affiliated to the Change to Win Federation (CtW). The largest union in the United States, the National Education Association (NEA), represents 3.2 million professional employees and is not affiliated to either the AFL-CIO or the CtW. Another non-affiliated union that I included in my population was the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE), which represents about 35,000 workers and has an established record of rank-and-file activism. The fragmentation and decentralization of the US labor movement is largely a product of the national industrial relations system that was established by the National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) of 1935. Under the Wagner Act, collective bargaining is predominantly conducted at the

enterprise level. “There are about 180,000 collective bargaining agreements in the United States” (Chaison 2006, 107). Local unions are primarily charged with collective bargaining and the day-to-day operations of workers, but they are advised and supported by their national unions. “There are more than 33,000 locals in the United States” (Chaison 2006, 36).

### *Research Questions*

In order to gather a preliminary analysis of labor transnationalism in the United States, I focused on several indicators and put forth three research questions. First, do unions maintain affiliations to Global Union Federations (GUFs), formerly known as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs)? National unions throughout the world have long affiliated to transnational labor organizations, which essentially embody the international labor movement. ITSs were first established in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and they represent unions working in specific industries or economic sectors. Today, there are eleven GUFs that work closely with the ITUC. GUF affiliation provides access to well established networks of unions from all over the world, and GUFs would presumably play an important role if unions were to shift towards a global union model.

Second, are unions educating their members about global issues and the potential value of transnational labor cooperation? Unions are democratic organizations. In principle, the direction and priorities of the union are controlled by the rank-and-file members, who periodically send delegates to convene at national conventions. If unions are shifting towards a global union model, I would expect that unions facilitate such a paradigm shift by educating their members about global issues or providing opportunities

for the rank-and-file to engage in international labor solidarity. At the very least, rank-and-file members should be aware of the GUF affiliations that are paid for with their union dues. To answer this question I surveyed the websites of unions for comprehensive information regarding international affairs and GUF-affiliations.

Third, do unions staff a dedicated department or director of international affairs? The organizational structure of union headquarters reflects the priorities of the organization. Price argued that if unions are serious about internationalism, “then continuous attention must be given to the work by qualified people who are not overburdened by other activities.” He added, “A trade union...affiliated to an international body needs at least an international secretary, with in some cases an international department” (Price 1947, 170). Such a staff would deal with international affairs on a daily basis and would presumably be better equipped to facilitate transnational labor cooperation. In addition, the costs associated with maintaining such staff would have to be justified to the membership as an important function of the union.

### *Results and Analysis*

There are eleven GUFs included among the Global Unions. Addressing my first question, I surveyed the membership data of GUFs to identify unions in the United States that maintain GUF affiliations. Most unions in my survey are affiliated to at least one GUF. Membership data from the GUFs showed that 40 of the 65 unions surveyed in my population (61.5%) are affiliated to at least one GUF (see **Table 2**). Of the 40 unions, 19 are affiliated to more than one GUF. Obviously, many unions in the United States perceive benefits from maintaining costly affiliations, but what do they gain specifically?

Access to trusted networks of unions was a common theme that emerged from interviews with union officials. An International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) official said that they affiliated to several GUFs because “in a way it’s a signal to the rest of the international labor movement that we are willing to be a reciprocal player in international relations.” He added that they benefit from the linkage and contacts that are facilitated by GUFs. He said, “There’s some places around the world where I don’t bring a set of contacts that we need so they can help provide contacts as well.”<sup>49</sup> A United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) official explained, “We basically use them [GUFs] as our platform for international activities.”<sup>50</sup> He went on to say that by being part of the global community unions are more likely to gain trust so that when they have a problem other unions are much more likely to help. A Laborers’ International Union of North America (LIUNA) official emphasized the value of GUFs as important “networking facilitators.”<sup>51</sup> An American Postal Workers Union (APWU) official said GUF affiliation was important because globalization has made the world interconnected.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>50</sup> UFCW official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>51</sup> LIUNA official, interview, July 18, 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>52</sup> APWU official, interview, July 19, 2007, Washington, D.C.

**Table 2: GUF Affiliations of 65 Unions in the United States**

<b>UNIONS</b>	<b>GUF Affiliation(s)</b>
Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA)	ITF
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)	n/a
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)	PSI
American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM)	FIM/IAEA
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)	n/a
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	PSI, IUF, ITF
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	EI, PSI
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)	IFJ, FIA/IAEA
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)	UNI
American Radio Association (ARA)	n/a
American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA)	n/a
Associated Actors and Artists of America (4As), which includes Actors' Equity Association (AEA), American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA), Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and The Guild of Italian American Actors (GIAA)	n/a
Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM)	IUF
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS)	n/a
California Nurses Association-National Nurses Organizing Committee (CAN/NNOC)	n/a
California School Employees Association (CSEA)	n/a
Communication Workers of America (CWA), which includes The Newspaper Guild (TNG), the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), and the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE)	IFJ, IMF, ITF, UNI
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)	n/a
Federation of Professional Athletes	n/a
Glass Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers International Union (GMP)	n/a
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States and its Territories and Canada (IATSE)	UNI

International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Iron Workers)	BWI
International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)	n/a
International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers (AWIU)	n/a
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)	ITF, IMF, BWI
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB)	ICEM, IMF
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)	n/a
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	BWI, ICEM, ITF, IUF, PSI, UNI
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)	IMF, UNI
International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)	ICEM, ITF
International Longshoremens' Association (ILA)	ITF
International Plate Printers, Die Stampers and Engravers Union of North America	n/a
International Union of Allied Novelty and Production Workers (Novelty and Production Workers)	n/a
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC)	n/a
International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)	IMF
International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)	ICEM
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades of the United States and Canada (Painters and Allied Trades)	n/a
International Union of Police Associations (IUPA)	n/a
Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA)	BWI, ICEM
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA), which includes Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS)	ITF
National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)	ITF
National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)	UNI
National Education Association (NEA)	EI
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)	UNI
Office of Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)	UNI

Operative Plasters' and Cement Masons' International Association of the United States and Canada (OP&CMIA)	n/a
Seafarers International Union of North America (SIU)	ITF
Service Employees' Union International (SEIU)	ITF, IUF, PSI, UNI
Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA)	BWI, IMF
Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)	ITF
Transportation Communications International Union-International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (TCU/IAM)	ITF
United American Nurses (UAN)	n/a
United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA)	n/a
United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)	ICEM, IFJ, IMF
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)	n/a
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)	ICEM, PSI
United Farm Workers (UFW)	n/a
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	ITGLWF, IUF, UNI
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)	ICEM
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW)	BWI, ICEM, IMF, IUF
United Transportation Union (UTU)	ITF
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers (Roofers and Waterproofers)	n/a
UNITE-HERE	ITF, ITGLWF, IUF, UNI
Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)	ICEM, PSI
Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)	IFJ, UNI

\*Data compiled by the author from GUF membership directories.

However, some union officials admitted having limited involvement with GUFs, and in some cases, expressed criticism. When asked about his union's affiliation to GUFs, a Sheet Metal Workers' International Association (SMWIA) official explained, "They're pretty responsive to what we ask them to do, but like I said it's a big world out there and they spend a lot of time building sustainable labor movements in developing countries."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the official believed that GUFs were preoccupied with aiding fledgling labor movements. A United Auto Workers (UAW) official noted the importance of their affiliations but admitted that his union preferred union-to-union contact. Interestingly, he said that one of his colleagues from a different union once joked that one particular GUF was in effect a "very expensive phonebook."<sup>54</sup> An American Federation of Teachers (AFT) official explained that the regional structures of GUFs can sometimes hurt them. He gave an example of how some unions in Latin America try to "out left" each other, which can be counterproductive to the work of the GUF.<sup>55</sup> In another case, an International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) official said that their involvement with GUFs was "marginal" and that IBEW disaffiliated from the International Metalworkers' Federation (IMF) sometime around 2001 and only worked occasionally with UNI as a "welcome guest."<sup>56</sup> In one case, I spoke to a Director of Public Relations about their affiliation with a GUF, and he was unaware of their affiliation. In fact, he stated that their union considered the GUF in question as "quite radical" and informed me that his union in no way associated with the GUF. When I asked him to explain how he reconciled this view with the fact that his

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<sup>53</sup> SMWIA official, interview, August 9, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>54</sup> UAW official, interview, July 19, 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>55</sup> AFT official, interview, February 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>56</sup> IBEW official, interview, August 9, 2006, Washington, D.C.

union paid affiliation dues to the GUF, he attributed their membership to someone in the union who must have convinced the union at one time to join.<sup>57</sup>

Although several unions are affiliated to more than one GUF, they often treat their affiliations differently. This may be attributed to the fact that larger unions represent a diverse range of workers in various sectors or they have better working relationships with some GUFs. For example, the AFT is affiliated to Education International (EI) and Public Services International (PSI), but the staff at AFT worked more closely with and was more knowledgeable about EI. Despite the fact that most of SEIU's 1.8 million members are in the public sector, an SEIU official admitted that they were more engaged with Union Network International (UNI) than PSI, which is the GUF that is mainly responsible for public service workers. In fact, SEIU staffs a permanent position at UNI's headquarters in Nyons, Switzerland.<sup>58</sup> The Communications Workers of America (CWA) is affiliated to four GUFs, but some of those affiliations are largely maintained by affiliates of the CWA (e.g. Association of Flight Attendants and The Newspaper Guild). The CWA leadership appeared to be most active in UNI's telecom sector. The IBT maintains the highest number of GUF affiliations (six), which is indicative of the broad range of workers that they represent.

It is quite common that affiliation to GUFs also involves participation in the governing structures of GUFs. GUF leadership roles are typically broken down into geographical regions and most of the unions in the United States that are affiliated to GUFs also serve in some leadership capacity. For example, Joe Hansen, who is president of the UFCW, also serves as the elected president of UNI. He is the only American

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<sup>57</sup> Anonymous union official, phone conversation, August 14, 2009

<sup>58</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

currently serving as president of a GUF. Thomas Buffenbarger, who is president of International Association of Machinists (IAM), was elected vice president of the IMF in 2009. The presidents of the United Steel Workers (USW), UAW, and IAM are also elected members of IMF's Executive Committee. Richard Hughes, who is president of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), serves on the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF)'s Executive Committee. Bernie Evers, Director of Organizing for the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Ironworkers), was elected as the regional vice president on the Building and Wood Workers' International (BWI)'s World Board. However, because of representational overlap, national leaders elected to international positions "tend to view international problems from general national points of view" (Lorwin 1953, 342).

At a time when union resources are strained as a result of declining memberships, it is noteworthy that unions continue to justify the costs of GUF affiliations. My results indicate that most of the unions surveyed are at least minimally engaged in labor transnationalism by maintaining GUF affiliations. However, affiliation to a GUF does not reveal the full extent to which unions in the United States are necessarily involved with labor transnationalism.

Educating members about global issues and international solidarity is logically an important step towards greater involvement in labor transnationalism. The internet has evolved as an important resource for unions, and unions are using the internet to post information and offer services to their members (Shostak 2002; Lee 2004). Eric Lee even goes so far as to argue, "Thanks to the Internet, a century-long decline in internationalism has already been reversed" (1997, 186). At the very least, the internet

has become a valuable resource for rank-and-file members to stay informed about their union. If unions are committed to “going global,” then I would expect to see information related to labor transnationalism accessible to rank-and-file members on their websites. Of the 65 unions in my population, only five unions do not have websites. On three different occasions, I viewed the websites of 60 unions and compiled data on two broad categories.<sup>59</sup>

First, I analyzed the websites of the 40 unions affiliated to GUFs to check whether these affiliations were reported on the unions’ websites. I began by logging on to the unions’ homepages for information regarding GUFs. Next, I conducted searches on all the main tabs on the unions’ websites, including the “About Us” tab, which most unions had available on their websites. My findings revealed that a significant number of unions do not report the fact that they are affiliated to a GUF (see *Table 3*). Only three (ILA, National Association of Letter Carriers, UFCW) of the 40 unions gave any indication on their homepage of their GUF affiliation either by explicitly stating their affiliation with the GUF and/or providing a hyper-link to the GUF. Upon further navigation of unions’ websites, 21 unions either stated their affiliation and/or provided a hyper-link to the GUF(s) somewhere other than their homepages. In most of these cases, GUFs were briefly described and/or simply included as one of several links on a links or resources page. Only a handful of unions, including the AFT, CWA, IAM, IBB, NALC, NEA, UE, UFCW, and USW, provided a more substantive explanation of their relationships with

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<sup>59</sup> I accessed all 60 websites at least three times on May 26, 2009, May 29, 2009, and June 4, 2009.

**Table 3: Information regarding US Unions' GUF affiliations on their websites**

<b>UNION</b>	<b>GUF link or mention on Union Homepage</b>	<b>Upon further navigation (other than homepage), mention, describe or link to GUF</b>
Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA)	No	No
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)	No	No
American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM)	No	No
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	No	No
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	No	Yes
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)	No	Yes
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)	No	Yes
Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM)	No	Yes
Communication Workers of America (CWA), which includes The Newspaper Guild (TNG), the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), and the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE)	No	Yes
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States and its Territories and Canada (IATSE)	No	No
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Iron Workers)	No	No
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)	No	Yes

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB)	No	Yes
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	No	No
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)	No	Yes
International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)	No	Yes
International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)	Yes	Yes
International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)	No	No
International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)	No	No
Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA)	No	No
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA), which includes Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS)	No	Yes
National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)	No	No
National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)	Yes	Yes
National Education Association (NEA)	No	Yes
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)	No	Yes
Office of Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)	No	No
Seafarers International Union of North America (SIU)	No	No
Service Employees' Union International (SEIU)	No	Yes
Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA)	No	No
Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)	No	Yes
Transportation Communications International Union-International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (TCU/IAM)	No	Yes

United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)	No	Yes
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)	No	Yes
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	Yes	Yes
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)	No	No
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW)	No	Yes
United Transportation Union (UTU)	No	No
UNITE-HERE	No	No
Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)	No	No
Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)	No	No

\*I surveyed all 40 websites on three different dates: May 26, 2009, May 29, 2009, and June 4, 2009.

GUFs. Of the 40 unions, 19 unions did not post any information about or hyper-links to the GUF(s).

The union officials that I interviewed conceded that most of the rank-and-file were probably unfamiliar with GUFs. This anonymity did not concern them much. My findings suggest that although GUF affiliation is important to many unions in the United States, GUFs remain a predominantly union elite endeavor. Interviewed on the subject, GUF officials expressed frustration that access to the rank-and-file was strictly controlled by national unions. An International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) official said that when they contacted rank-and-file members at the plant level directly they "step on some toes" and national unions prefer contacts to be made through them.<sup>60</sup> In preparation for EI's Global Week of Action as part of the Global Campaign for Education, EI sends out campaign

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<sup>60</sup> IUF official, interview, June 7, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

kits to its affiliates. An EI official said it would be overstepping the national union's turf to deal directly with the rank-and-file members.<sup>61</sup>

Second, I expected to find issues on unions' websites that were important to the organization and their members. I specifically looked for keyword links and/or tabs related to labor transnationalism, including "international affairs," "global issues," or "international solidarity." If going global is a priority for the US labor movement, then educating rank-and-file members about globalization and international solidarity would be important for unions to strive towards this goal. My findings revealed that only one union (UE) of the 60 surveyed offered an "International Solidarity" tab on its homepage (see *Table 4*). Furthermore, a significant majority of unions do not have a specific category anywhere on their websites devoted to "Global Issues" or "International Solidarity." There were a few exceptions, including AFT, CWA, IAM, NALC, NEA, SEIU, UE, and USW.

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<sup>61</sup> EI official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

**Table 4: U.S. Unions and Website Information on “International Affairs,” “Global Issues,” and/or “International Solidarity”**

<b>UNIONS</b>	<b>Link to “International Affairs,” “Global Issues,” or “International Solidarity” on Union Homepage</b>	<b>Upon further navigation (other than homepage), link or tab to “International Affairs,” “Global Issues,” or “International Solidarity”</b>
Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA)	No*	No
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)	No	No*
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)	No	No
American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM)	No	No*
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)	No	No
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	No	No
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	No	Yes
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)	No	No
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)	No	No
American Radio Association (ARA)	n/a	n/a
American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA)	n/a	n/a
Associated Actors and Artists of America (4As), which includes Actors’ Equity Association (AEA), American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA), Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and The Guild of Italian American Actors (GIAA)	n/a	n/a
Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM)	No	No*

Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS)	No	No
California Nurses Association-National Nurses Organizing Committee (CAN/NNOC)	No	No
California School Employees Association (CSEA)	No	No
Communication Workers of America (CWA), which includes The Newspaper Guild (TNG), the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), and the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE)	No	Yes
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)	No	No
Federation of Professional Athletes	No	No
Glass Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers International Union (GMP)	No	No
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States and its Territories and Canada (IATSE)	No	No*
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Iron Workers)	No	No*
International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)	No	No*
International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers (AWIU)	No	No
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)	No	Yes
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB)	No	No*
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)	No	No
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	No	No*
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)	No	No
International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)	No	No
International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)	No	No

International Plate Printers, Die Stampers and Engravers Union of North America	n/a	n/a
International Union of Allied Novelty and Production Workers (Novelty and Production Workers)	n/a	n/a
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC)	No	No*
International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)	No	No
International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)	No	No
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades of the United States and Canada (Painters and Allied Trades)	No	No
International Union of Police Associations (IUPA)	No	No
Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA)	No	No
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA), which includes Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS)	No	No
National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)	No	No
National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)	No	Yes
National Education Association (NEA)	No	Yes
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)	No	No
Office of Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)	No	No
Operative Plasters' and Cement Masons' International Association of the United States and Canada (OP&CMIA)	No	No
Seafarers International Union of North America (SIU)	No	No
Service Employees' Union International (SEIU)	No	Yes
Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA)	No	No
Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)	No	No
Transportation Communications International Union-International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (TCU/IAM)	No	Yes

United American Nurses (UAN)	No	No
United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA)	No	No
United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)	No	No
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)	No	No
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)	Yes	Yes
United Farm Workers (UFW)	No	No
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	No	No
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)	No	No
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW)	No	Yes
United Transportation Union (UTU)	No	No
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers (Roofers and Waterproofers)	No	No
UNITE-HERE	No	No
Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)	No	No
Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)	No	No

I surveyed all 60 websites on May 26, 2009, May 29, 2009, and June 4, 2009.

\*Several unions in the United States maintain affiliates in Canada. Some websites had links to their Canadian affiliates and/or offices. However, since these affiliates are part of North America, I did not include them as part of an “international” or “global” reference.

My findings show that most unions in the United States do not post comprehensive information about their GUF affiliations and international affairs on their websites. Unions that are affiliated to GUFs typically did not explain the purpose of these affiliations on their websites. Additionally, I had the benefit of knowing exactly what I was searching for on the unions’ websites. However, it is unlikely that a rank-and-file member who was perusing his or her national union’s website would take notice of the GUF affiliation. Furthermore, international affairs were not featured prominently on

unions' websites. Most websites offered information about "national issues" with little or no attention paid to international issues.

Next, in order to address the challenges posed by globalization, I had expected the organizational structure of unions to reflect an increased emphasis on international affairs. Relying on interviews, email and telephone inquiries, and information about the organizational structure made publicly available by unions, I identified unions that have a dedicated department and/or director in charge of international affairs. My findings reveal that most unions do not staff a bureaucratic department in charge of international affairs (see *Table 5*). In fact, most unions do not have a staff person whose main responsibility is international affairs (e.g. Director of International Affairs). In several cases, the responsibilities for international affairs were primarily handled by a union officer and his or her designee on a part-time basis. This was the case for the APWU and the CWA. Only a small number of unions maintain bureaucratic departments charged with international affairs. For example, the AFT has a Department of International Affairs led by a director and 8-10 staff members. The IAM has a Department of Trade and Globalization led by a director and an administrative assistant.

**Table 5: U.S. Unions and International Affairs Departments and/or Director  
(or its Equivalent)**

<b>Union</b>	<b>International Affairs Department and/or Director (or equivalent)</b>	<b>Title of Department and/or Director</b>
Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA)	No**	n/a
Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)	No**	n/a
American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE)	No**	n/a
American Federation of Musicians of the United States and Canada (AFM)	No*	n/a
American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA)	No**	n/a
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)	No**	n/a
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)	Yes**	Department of International Affairs, led by a Director of International Affairs (David Dorn) and staff of about 8-10
American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA)	No**	n/a
American Postal Workers Union (APWU)	No**	n/a
American Radio Association (ARA)	No**	ARA is affiliated to ILWU, which has an International Department
American Train Dispatchers Association (ATDA)	No**	n/a

Associated Actors and Artists of America (4As), which includes Actors' Equity Association (AEA), American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA), Screen Actors Guild (SAG), and The Guild of Italian American Actors (GIAA)	Information unavailable	
Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Union (BCTGM)	No**	n/a
Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen (BRS)	No**	n/a
California Nurses Association-National Nurses Organizing Committee (CAN/NNOC)	No**	n/a
California School Employees Association (CSEA)	No**	n/a
Communication Workers of America (CWA), which includes The Newspaper Guild (TNG), the Association of Flight Attendants (AFA), and the International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE)	No**	n/a
Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC)	Information unavailable	
Federation of Professional Athletes	No**	n/a
Glass Molders, Pottery, Plastics and Allied Workers International Union (GMP)	No**	n/a
International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States and its Territories and Canada (IATSE)	No*	n/a
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers (Iron Workers)	No*	n/a
International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)	No**	n/a

International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Asbestos Workers (AWIU)	Information unavailable	
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM)	Yes	Department of Trade and Globalization led by a Director (Owen Hernstadt) and an administrative assistant
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and Helpers (IBB)	No*	n/a
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)	No**	n/a
International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)	Yes**	Director of Global Strategies (Tim Beaty)
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE)	No**	n/a
International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)	Yes**	International Department led by Director of International Affairs (Ray Familathe)
International Longshoremens' Association (ILA)	No**	n/a
International Plate Printers, Die Stammers and Engravers Union of North America	No**	n/a
International Union of Allied Novelty and Production Workers (Novelty and Production Workers)	Information unavailable	
International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers (BAC)	No**	n/a
International Union of Elevator Constructors (IUEC)	No**	n/a
International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE)	Information unavailable	
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades of the United States and Canada (Painters and Allied Trades)	No**	n/a
International Union of Police Associations (IUPA)	No**	n/a

Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA)	No**	n/a
Marine Engineers' Beneficial Association (MEBA), which includes Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS)	Information unavailable	
National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)	No**	n/a
National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC)	No**	n/a
National Education Association (NEA)	Yes*	Office of International Relations
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (NPMHU)	No**	n/a
Office of Professional Employees International Union (OPEIU)	No**	n/a
Operative Plasters' and Cement Masons' International Association of the United States and Canada (OP&CMIA)	No**	n/a
Seafarers International Union of North America (SIU)	No**	n/a
Service Employees' Union International (SEIU)	Yes**	Global Organizing Department lead by a Director (Debbie Schneider) and a staff of about 12, including 6 working abroad
Sheet Metal Workers International Association (SMWIA)	No**	n/a
Transport Workers Union of America (TWU)	No*	n/a
Transportation Communications International Union-International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (TCU/IAM)	Yes*	TCU is affiliated to IAM, which has a Department of Trade and Globalization
United American Nurses (UAN)	No**	n/a
United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States and Canada (UA)	No*	n/a

United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW)	Yes**	Department of Governmental and International Affairs – Deputy Director (Doug Meyers) handles IA with an administrative assistant
United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America (UBC)	Information unavailable	
United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE)	Yes*	International Department of the UE
United Farm Workers (UFW)	Information unavailable	
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)	Yes**	Director of Global Strategies (Alan Spaulding)
United Mine Workers of America (UMWA)	No**	n/a
United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and Service Workers International Union (USW)	Yes**	Department of International Affairs, Strategic Campaigns, and Global Bargaining, led by a Director (Gerry Fernandez) and a staff of about 11
United Transportation Union (UTU)	No**	n/a
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers and Allied Workers (Roofers and Waterproofers)	No**	n/a
UNITE-HERE	Information unavailable	
Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)	No*	
Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE)	No**	

\*Information obtained from union's website.

\*\*Information obtained through personal correspondence (email, phone, or interview)

In sum, it is interesting that despite the fact that 61.5% percent of the unions surveyed are affiliated to GUFs, most unions do not bother to explain their affiliations on their websites. In fact, in a significant number of cases, I could not find any evidence whatsoever of a GUF affiliation. In addition, most unions do not dedicate a portion of their website to international affairs or international solidarity. This was a striking omission considering that most of the websites surveyed offered a wealth of information about the union, including who they represented and what industries they served, the services they offered, the benefits of membership, profiles of leadership, and political issues pertaining to the labor movement (e.g. the Employee Free Choice Act). Finally, unions are generally not institutionally set-up to handle international affairs on a day-to-day basis. Only a handful of unions had a dedicated staff in charge of international affairs.

### **Analysis**

An analysis of labor transnationalism in the United States based on three indicators suggests that in general unions are not undergoing transformative changes towards a global union model. Unions throughout the world must contend with the contradiction of the international labor movement. On one hand, there is recognition on the part of many unions and analysts that more must be done at the international level for unions to adapt to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On the other hand, the day-to-day work of unions is nationally based and governed by national industrial relations rules. Therefore, the international labor movement is subordinate to local and national priorities, and as a result, it remains underfunded, uncoordinated, and generally ill-equipped to deal

effectively with global capital. In order to overcome this contradiction, unions in the United States will have to be more strategic about their transnational activities.

The challenge for unions in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to strengthen their international outlook without undermining their national position. An important first step is affiliation with GUFs, which most unions in my research have taken. Building trusted networks among unions worldwide lays the groundwork for cooperation. An AFL-CIO official explained that solidarity does not happen overnight. He said, “It is about both sides recognizing their self-interest in it and that in order to really develop that effectively in the international scale you need to develop relationships of trust...and you cannot be perceived as always asking for something and never giving.”<sup>62</sup> GUFs can help cultivate these networks, but my research has shown that these networks remain predominantly a union elite activity.

In addition, there are significant limits to what GUFs can accomplish given the breadth and diversity of the international labor movement. Aside from the progress made with unenforceable international framework agreements, GUFs are not negotiating collective bargaining agreements with multinational employers. A SEIU official said, “The GUFs have the potential to be the structure to deal with the multinationals. I think with the exception of the ITF, they haven’t met that opportunity yet. It’s hard. And we think that the GUFs should be that, but they are not yet.”<sup>63</sup> Similarly, an IBT official would like GUFs to “be much more militant in dealing with the impact of globalization on workers” by designing strategies to empower unions to achieve particular objectives

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<sup>62</sup> AFL-CIO official, interview, August 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>63</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

through “coordinated international solidarity.”<sup>64</sup> However, because GUFs are based in Europe and largely staffed by Europeans who enjoy strong labor protection and established social dialogue the urgency to act aggressively is sometimes lost. In the meantime, some unions are pursuing alternative transnational strategies to adapt to the globalization of the economy.

Establishing bilateral transnational relationships with unions in other countries to work on specific campaigns is one way in which unions can optimize their resources. A SEIU official explained that important work can be done bilaterally “on building organizing capacity” and “organizer exchanges.” She said, “We are strong believers in the GUFs and working through the GUFs, but that you wouldn’t turn down other opportunities to build strength and relationships.” She cited bilateral projects in the UK, Australia, and New Zealand as examples. She also said that SEIU was looking to move “beyond solidarity” towards “partnerships.” She emphasized that it really comes down to interdependence. SEIU supports workers abroad because they are dealing with multinational employers, and if unions lose abroad, it affects unions in the United States.<sup>65</sup>

Other examples of strategic transnational alliances among unions include UE, CWA, and USW. UE developed close relationships with Mexican unions during the debate over NAFTA in the early 1990s. They entered into a “strategic alliance” with Mexican Frente Autentico del Trabajo (FAT), an independent labor federation in Mexico, and their relationship has evolved to include other joint projects and campaigns (Brecher, Costello, and Smith 2000). In the late 1990s, the “North Atlantic Alliance” was

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<sup>64</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>65</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

established by the CWA and two British telecom unions in response to British Telecom's acquisition of a twenty percent stake of MCI. The alliance targeted the anti-union practices of MCI and included three experienced CWA organizers who were sent to Britain to consult on organizing practices (Borgers 1999). In 2008, USW and Unite the Union, the largest union in Britain and Ireland, formally signed a merger agreement to establish a transatlantic union called Workers Uniting. One of the goals of the new union is to conduct transnational bargaining with MNCs (Greenhouse 2008a).

Another way in which unions are responding to globalization is by integrating transnational components into traditional departments. Several union officials who I interviewed explained recent changes that have taken place within their unions. In 1996, SEIU abolished its international affairs department, but at its 2004 convention, delegates passed a seven-point strategy for growth and global strength was targeted as a core area for growth. Soon after the convention, SEIU created its Global Organizing Department headed by the Director of Global Organizing Partnerships. The Global Organizing Department has a staff of six in its Washington, D.C. based office and an additional six organizers assigned abroad.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, the UFCW changed the title of its Director of International and Foreign Affairs to the Director of Global Strategies. Alan Spaulding, who is the current director, previously worked several years in the organizing department. The change in title reflected a more accurate description of the mission of the department, which a UFCW official characterized as "strategically oriented" and "targeted."<sup>67</sup> In response to the increasing number of multinational employers, the IBT created a Global Strategies Director position within their Strategic Research and

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<sup>66</sup> SEIU official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>67</sup> UFCW official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Campaign department in October 2005. An IBT official explained that the lines between international work and organizing have blurred, and many IBT organizers are very much involved in international work as well.<sup>68</sup>

A significant resurgence in labor transnationalism will ultimately depend on its perceived value by the rank-and-file, who union leaders are accountable through union elections. A LIUNA official stated that unions in the US had to move beyond the traditional “labor bureaucrat” who was charged with international affairs and attended international conferences. Unfortunately, pressure from rank-and-file members resulted in the abolishment of their international affairs department in the 1990s, and the LIUNA official admitted that more needed to be done to educate workers on global issues.<sup>69</sup> An APWU official suspected that only a small percentage of his members actually cared about international affairs.<sup>70</sup> The current “Buy American” campaign which has gained the support of many unions in the U.S. and was included as a provision of the recent stimulus economic recovery act, encapsulates the tight rope that unions must walk so as not to antagonize their brothers and sisters abroad, who might potentially view such a campaign as a return to American protectionism.

Overall, there are several generalizations that can be made about labor transnationalism in the United States. First, there is not significant evidence to suggest that unions are substantively evolving into global unions. Second, although the importance of labor transnationalism is recognized by many unions, it has not filtered down to the rank-and-file. Third, most unions do not appear to be significantly engaged in labor transnationalism. Finally, evidence of complex labor transnationalism can be

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<sup>68</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>69</sup> LIUNA official, interview, July 18, 2007, Washington, D.C.

<sup>70</sup> APWU official, interview, July 19, 2007, Washington, D.C.

identified in some unions that are proactively adapting to globalization. Complex labor transnationalism is a multi-dimensional approach to incorporating elements of labor transnationalism into the day-to-day operations of unions.

### **Towards Complex Labor Transnationalism**

A *Foreign Affairs* article cited a poll of AFL-CIO unions “that found that two-thirds of unions were engaged in international activity as a necessary extension of their normal organizing and bargaining; 87 percent said that they needed to do even more on the global scene” (Mazur, 2000). The more interesting follow-up question to this poll should have been what *specific* activities are unions engaged in or think that they need to be engaged in to support international labor solidarity? There are numerous activities that unions can utilize in support of labor transnationalism, and many of these activities do not necessarily have to be confined to a compartmentalized international affairs portfolio. Complex labor transnationalism can best be understood by breaking it down into various types of transnational activities. In this section, I put forth six types of activities associated with complex labor transnationalism: **communicative transnationalism, political transnationalism, steward transnationalism, protest transnationalism, collaborative transnationalism, and institutional transnationalism.** In addition, I offer examples from unions in the United States.

**Communicative transnationalism** refers to any activities that convey expressions of transnational labor solidarity but nothing that would necessarily involve more substantive actions. Examples of communicative transnationalism include resolutions of support from governing union bodies, personal messages from union officers on behalf of their membership, or even a mass email or letter writing campaign

targeting an anti-union employer. Communicative transnationalism is perhaps one of the oldest forms of labor transnationalism. Much of the impetus for the creation of the International Working Men's Association in 1864 came about as a result of correspondence between British and French unionists calling for solidarity with one another against the growing concentration of capital (Lorwin 1929, 29-40).

Union conventions are a common venue for communicative transnationalism, and international guest speakers are often featured. At IAM's 2008 convention in Orlando, the Director of the Trade and Globalization department hosted a panel discussion on the challenges of globalization where he emphasized the importance of the international labor movement. Invited guests included representatives from the ITF and the IMF. In 2006, the Teamsters passed a Global Solidarity motion at its 27<sup>th</sup> convention calling for the Teamsters to strengthen its relationships with GUFs. IBT president, Jim Hoffa, said, "The process of the concentration of companies and globalization of the economy force us to strengthen our international presence" (UNI 2006). Similarly, the 2008 USW Constitutional Convention passed a resolution, "Strengthening Global Activism for Economic Justice," which stated: "Our union will continue to build mutually beneficial global alliances with trade unions around the world, while forging a global union with the strength to challenge multinational corporations wherever we represent the interests of our members" (USW 2008).

Union folklore and song celebrate the mutual struggle that workers face worldwide, and communicative transnationalism is a strategy that frames issues in broader contexts so that workers understand how events abroad affect workers in the U.S. It is a building block for transnational labor solidarity that potentially leads toward more

substantive actions involving transnational cooperation among unions. Plus, the costs associated with this activity of labor transnationalism are rather low. Expressions of solidarity do not necessarily have to be followed up with action nor must they be sent with financial support; therefore, it is a cost effective way for unions to participate in transnational labor solidarity at all levels.

**Political transnationalism** refers to activities that involve directly lobbying national governments or international organizations for political action (e.g. ratification of ILO Conventions, adoption of labor rights standards, or trade sanctions against repressive regimes) that could potentially support or benefit workers at home and abroad. For example, during the Cold War, U.S. unions were particularly active in lobbying governments and international institutions to recognize free and independent trade unions (Ashwin 2000). Unions have also been strong advocates against child labor. Unions supported the Child Labor Deterrence Act of 1992 sponsored by Senator Tom Harkin and subsequent efforts to legislate against child labor (Brooks 2005). In a recent event to mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of ILO Convention 182, which commits member countries to combat the worst forms of child labor, AFL-CIO President John Sweeny participated in a roundtable discussion with the US Secretary of Labor to discuss global strategies to eradicate child labor (Parks 2009).

Lobbying for fair trade standards is also a popular activity of unions, and unions are vocal advocates of promoting minimal labor standards as a condition of free trade agreements. Unions argue that free trade agreements that do not include workers' rights provisions result in unfair trade practices and the exploitation of workers abroad. Unions from the US, Canada, and Mexico lobbied successfully for the creation of the North

American Agreement for Labor Cooperation (NAALC) as a mechanism to monitor labor standards within the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Compa 2001). Fair trade campaigns have resulted in union opposition to several free trade agreements negotiated by the United States, including agreements with South Korea, Colombia, and Panama. Unions also regularly draw attention to the annual ITUC publication of trade union rights violations throughout the world. In the 2008 presidential election, the proposed Colombia-US free trade agreement was an important issue for unions because of the documented violence that is regularly committed against trade unionists in Colombia.

**Steward transnationalism** refers to activities such as providing services, resources, training and/or leadership for union development to unions from different countries. During the Cold War, the AFL-CIO set up trade union institutes in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. After John Sweeney's election to the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995, the institutes merged into the AFL-CIO's American Center for International Labor Solidarity and many unions work with the Solidarity Center in support of transnational projects. Individual unions also provide support to solidarity programs. For example, the CWA's Eduardo Diaz Union-to-Union Solidarity Program solicits voluntary contributions from its locals of 10 cents per member per year to support selected charity programs abroad.

The AFT spends considerable resources on steward transnationalism. In 1989, AFT's International Affairs department created the Education for Democracy/International (ED/I) program which supports unions in the developing world. According to AFT's website, "The goal of ED/I is to provide teacher unions and

educators in newly emerging democracies with technical assistance in teacher training and the development of civic education curriculum materials.” The AFT has supported several projects throughout the world. In addition, an AFT official pointed out that about 35-40% of EI’s budget is provided by the AFT and NEA, and the AFT meets annually with other EI affiliates to decide where to spend money to support other unions. The AFT also raises money for African teachers’ unions for AIDS prevention and counseling through its Africa HIV/AIDS project.<sup>71</sup>

**Protest transnationalism** refers to activities that involve the participation of unionists in direct action or visible acts of solidarity as part of a demonstration, rally, sit-in, strike, or boycott. It involves more substantive acts of worker solidarity that are intended to show support of their fellow workers by engaging in some form of protest or action. In 1999, unionists and their allies took to the streets of Seattle and broke up the World Trade Organization ministerial meeting. The Seattle protests marked a watershed event for the revival of labor transnationalism (Waterman 2001). Moody has also noticed an increase in rank-and-file activism since the end of the Cold War. He observed, “The pressures of globalization and lean production, the transforming powers of renewed struggle, and the fresh forces that have come to the working class in recent decades are all pushing the working class and its organizations in a more aggressive and confrontational direction” (1997, 289).

Protest transnationalism also includes corporate campaigns to boycott certain products or honor international strike picket lines. The 1997 United Parcel Service (UPS) strike involved more than 150 job actions in both the United States and Europe (Mazur

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<sup>71</sup> AFT official, interview, February 10, 2006, Washington, D.C.

2000). Protest transnationalism is a visible extension of communicative transnationalism and requires much more coordination and planning.

**Collaborative transnationalism** refers to activities that include unions collaborating with other unions and/or non-state actors (e.g. NGOs) in transnational campaigns. Turner argues that globalization forces unions into a “logic of participation” whereby “unions may increasingly seek allies and mobilize members” (2006, 94). In most instances, this collaboration will be between national unions. The growth of multinational corporations has naturally led to the sharing of information between workers employed by the same employer. Information sharing can provide useful resources in their respective work place negotiations, and it can also help to mitigate the tendency for corporations to play unions off of one another.

There are numerous examples of collaborative transnationalism among unions. For example, in 1993, unions in Britain, Australia, Venezuela, and South Africa engaged in solidarity actions with the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) to support its strike against an Anglo-American conglomerate headquartered in London, which eventually resulted in a five-year agreement (Zinn 2000). SEIU has built global partnerships with unions abroad. In its Driving Up Standards campaign, SEIU partnered with the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), a British union, to apply pressure on two UK-based companies that provide private bus services in the United States. It involved mutual exchanges of ideas and visits from union leaders. Tattersall argues that global union coalitions, such as SEIU’s global partnerships, are “just one example of a possible source of powerful collaboration that can support a renewal of union power” (2007, 173). UFCW has launched an aggressive campaign against

Walmart, the largest private employer in the United States. As part of this campaign, UFCW officials have met with unions in Korea, Brazil, Germany, Japan, and Russia to educate them about the anti-union practices of Walmart in America.<sup>72</sup>

Collaboration transnationalism also involves cooperation between unions and NGOs. The USW formed a strategic alliance with the Sierra Club called the Blue/Green Alliance to promote environmental standards in manufacturing (Greenhouse 2006). Unions will also cooperate with NGOs to advance broader transnational issues such as fair trade, child labor, forced slavery, or peace. For example, the UFCW financially supports the Student Labor Action Project (SLAP), which promotes economic justice on college campuses, and serves on its board.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the IBT has a close relationship with United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS).<sup>74</sup>

Finally, **institutional transnationalism** refers to activities associated with unions' affiliation with transnational labor organizations, including GUFs. Affiliations with TLOs are more formalized and are usually governed by a founding charter or constitution. GUFs typically convene congresses every four to five years where delegates vote on policies and elect leadership. Executive boards of GUFs usually meet at least once per year, while the day-to-day work of GUFs is administered by a secretariat. Affiliation to GUFs requires paying dues, which can be expensive for financially strapped unions. Most GUFs have regional organizations or offices associated with them as well as industry-specific sectors, where unions can focus more exclusively on particular issues or concerns. For example, UNI's sectors include UNI telecom, UNI property services, and UNI finance among others. The ICEM has also created Global

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<sup>72</sup> UFCW official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>73</sup> UFCW official, interview, August 17, 2006, Washington, D.C.

<sup>74</sup> IBT official, interview, August 15, 2006, Washington, D.C.

Corporate Networks that facilitate communication between unions who share common employers.

In sum, the activities of complex labor transnationalism demonstrate the multiple approaches that unions can take to increase their international profile. These activities are not mutually exclusive of one another, and in most cases, they will be used in tandem with one another. In addition, they can be used to supplement national union priorities. For example, the national campaign to pass the Employee Free Choice Act can be easily linked to the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which includes the freedom of association. Complex labor transnationalism can help to cultivate a sense of shared identity among workers that will be necessary if unions aim to become "global" unions in the future.

### **The Writing on the Wall**

Unions in the United States are mindful that labor transnational can potentially serve important purposes in their strategic repertoire. There is no single effective approach to labor transnationalism, and unions can tailor their transnational activities to meet specific goals. Engaging in transnational labor solidarity can be more substantive than attending international conferences, and increasingly, there are more incentives for unions to turn to labor transnationalism.

However, transnational labor solidarity is inherently weakened by the contradiction of the international labor movement. National unions must simultaneously promote workers' rights on many levels. National issues, such as legislation to make it easier to form a union and national healthcare, are priorities for unions. In addition, transnational labor solidarity can be hurt by internal divisions within the U.S. labor

movement. In 2005, a rift between several unions and the AFL-CIO resulted in the disaffiliation of several unions. Subsequently, a rival federation, Change to Win Federation (CtW), was formed that has caused some animosity among union leaders. The CtW applied for membership to the ITUC in 2006, but as of 2009, their application has not been approved. In 2009, UNITE-HERE, which merged in 2004, was embroiled in an ugly break-up as the UNITE president sought affiliation with SEIU (Meyerson 2009). Turf wars among unions are quite common among unions. Public sector unions, including AFSCME and SEIU, have fought publicly over jurisdictions, and Langevin (forthcoming) argues that “interunion contestation” undermines the potential for cooperation at the international level.

Nevertheless, there is a growing call for global unions. Andy Stern, president of SEIU, writes, “The world needs global unions...National unions by their very nature are not built to have the strength to successfully address their members’ issues when they operate in only one country of a global employer. Global unions would have the reach and strength to get the job done for workers everywhere” (Stern 2006, 111).

Although some unions view global unions as ideal, their development will require the consent of multinational employers that have resisted transnational level bargaining. Frankly, the path to global unions will be arduous, but it is clear that the conversation for global unions has begun. My research has shown there is evidence that some unions are taking measured steps toward this goal. The USW has gone further than any of the unions when they formally merged with Unite the Union, made up of British and Irish workers, to form Workers Uniting. Under the terms of the merger, unions will retain their individual identities for the time being and a joint steering committee will meet

regularly to coordinate the activities of Working United. Other unions, including SEIU, UE, and CWA are very active in building strategic transnational relationships. SEIU has the one of the most active and largest international programs in the U.S.

Complex labor transnationalism is not the magic bullet to reverse the decline of unions in the United States. However, unions that fail to consider its possibilities will find it difficult adapt to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a sense of urgency among some unions in the United States for change. A SEIU official wrote, “Global labor solidarity, as currently practiced, is failing and will continue to fail in the face of the growing power of global corporations and the declining power of the state. Instead, global unions need to be formed whose purpose is to unite workers to negotiate global agreements with global corporations” (Lerner 2007). More importantly, the rank-and-file members must be included in this process. David Cormier and Harry Targ argued, “Workers need to learn about trade, foreign investment, and international finance, and how to integrate this knowledge into strategies for collective bargaining and cross-border union alliances” (2001, 55). However, I did not see much evidence that unions are facilitating this knowledge. Most unions in my study appear to be taking a minimalist approach to labor transnationalism. Unions will need to be more proactive in educating their members if they are serious about fundamentally changing the structure of unions.

There are intra-national differences in the levels of labor transnationalism in the United States. Some unions are more proactive in their approach to labor transnationalism, but they also face institutional and cultural obstacles. The most important thing to take away from this study is that unions have options when it comes to labor transnationalism. In order for transnational labor solidarity to be achieved, more

national unions need to acknowledge the variety of options open to them and take advantage of them. Complex labor transnationalism can help facilitate the path towards global unions by strategically incorporating labor transnationalism into various areas of union governance.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL LABOR

The two components of global labor – national union organizations and Global Unions – are mutually dependent on one another. Global Unions provide a substantive framework to identify the interests of global labor. However, national union organizations are the critical forces that express these interests through actions. When Global Unions and national union organizations work in concert with one another, global labor has the potential to be an important factor in international politics. However, the ability of global labor to act authoritatively at the international level is undermined by its inherent structural weaknesses. My research on global labor has led me to draw several conclusions.

**First, although prospects for global solidarity appear greater than ever, global labor is still undermined by internal divisions.** In Chapter 2, I surveyed the history of the international labor movement and found that competition among transnational labor organizations and union elites was quite common. “Solidarity sometimes” rather than “solidarity forever” best characterized the episodic periods of united international unionism. Since the end of the Cold War and communism, there has been optimism for greater unity. O’Brien (2000b) argues that the international labor movement is mobilizing around a common enemy: neo-liberalism. After the founding of the ITUC, Traub-Merz and Eckl concluded, “Organizationally, the international trade union movement has never been more united than at present” (2007, 7). However, as I pointed out in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, internal divisions remain. One of the most important cleavages stems from debates over international labor standards between

unions from the Global North and Global South (Wilkinson, Haworth, and Hughes 2001). Some southern unions fear that international labor standards are supported by northern unions to stem the flow of capital to cheaper labor markets in the Global South.

In addition, the issue of trust between unions has not been reconciled, particularly as it pertains to relations with U.S. unions. The activities of U.S. unions during the Cold War undermined global solidarity (Sims 1992). Several union officials who I interviewed are mindful of this distrust and hoped that by engaging with other unions they can begin to regain their trust, but it is no easy task. Neil Kearney, ITGLWF general secretary, has said, “The depth of hostility to the U.S. is like nothing I’ve ever seen. Nobody wants to cooperate with U.S. unions” (Howard 2007). An ICEM official worried that American affiliates were cutting back their obligations to the ICEM, and he also blamed American unions for giving in to concessions during the 1980s and 1990s that have resulted in pressure for European unions to do the same.<sup>75</sup> Unless US unions are viewed as team players, the transnational activities of US unions will be viewed suspiciously further impeding global labor solidarity.

Even among Global Unions, solidarity cannot be taken from granted. An IUF official admitted that his organization did not take the ICFTU very seriously because it has to take into account so many diverse points of views that at times it is rendered impotent. He also added that there was somewhat of a rivalry between the IUF and UNI.<sup>76</sup> The IMF chose not to formally participate in the Council of Global Unions because it did not see the necessity of creating yet another bureaucratic institution.

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<sup>75</sup> ICEM official, interview, June 3, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>76</sup> IUF official, interview, June 7, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

In Chapter 4, I noted several factors that discourage national unions from transnational labor cooperation, including declining resources, turf wars, and local prejudices. In addition, the current global economic crisis has put pressure on governments to create and/or sustain jobs while unemployment rises. In its February 5, 2009 edition, *The Economist* warned of the rising specter of economic nationalism: “Economic nationalism—the urge to keep jobs and capital at home—is both turning the economic crisis into a political one and threatening the world with depression.” The temptation to attribute economic woes to foreign scapegoats is particularly susceptible among workers who view globalization as a threat to their livelihoods. Nationalism has been a source of division in the past, and it remains a formidable obstacle in the present.

**Second, the interests of global labor will more often than not align with those of powerful, national unions from the Global North because of the structural dependency on them by Global Unions.** Global Unions are essentially bound by the hand that feeds them. In this case, affluent unions from the Global North provide the lion share of their budgets through a progressive dues structure. The ICFTU’s affiliation fees in 1998 were divided accordingly by regions: Africa (1.4%), Asia and Pacific, including the Middle East (15.6%), Europe (58.6%), Latin America and Caribbean (0.3%), and North America (24%) (Gumbrell-McCormick 2004, 185). Essentially, this means that unions from Europe and North America contributed 82.6% of the ITUC’s overall membership dues, which is a vital source of funding for the ITUC. The dependency on northern unions for resources poses a dilemma for southern unions who are potential beneficiaries. Anner describes this as the paradox of labor transnationalism (2007).

In a case study of the ICFTU's response to globalization from 1996-2002, Stuart Hodkinson rejects the notion by O'Brien (2000b) that global labor is becoming more radicalized. Instead, Hodkinson notes that the ICFTU's social clause campaign appeases the interests of northern unions by asserting unions as "responsible partners" engaged in global business unionism (2005). A UNI official admitted that part of his job was to consult UNI affiliates that were too leftist and nudge them towards a social dialogue approach to MNCs, which was the approach preferred by most European unions.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the interests of northern unions are protected by the political leadership of Global Unions who primarily have backgrounds in the northern union movement. Hodkinson explained how Bill Jordan was chosen as the new general secretary of the ICFTU in 1994, despite the fact that Luis Anderson (secretary general of ICFTU's American regional organization) was the clear favorite among affiliates, because his candidacy was supported by the big four – AFL-CIO, DGB, TUC and Rengo (2005).

**Third, incentives for national unions to "go global" are increasing; however, Global Unions remain underfunded and underutilized.** In Chapter 4, I explored the conditions under which national unions engage in labor transnationalism. At the national level, the decline of union membership has made unions more vulnerable as opportunity structures are less effective (or increasingly unavailable) in achieving the goals of their organizations. For example, in Germany, where unions traditionally enjoyed a strong institutional advantage, there has been a tendency towards decentralized bargaining and the introduction of "opening clauses" in sectoral collective agreements, which open the door to firm-level negotiations. This has resulted in some German unions exploring strategies for transnational union cooperation to offset the possibility of employers

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<sup>77</sup> UNI official, interview, June 6, 2005, Geneva, Switzerland

circumventing the national framework (Dribbusch and Schulten 2008). Logue (1980) argues that internationalism is more likely when unions' ability to achieve their goals in their national environment is reduced.

At the international level, opportunities to pursue transnational strategies are facilitated by international opportunity structures found among international labor standards regimes, international organizations, MNCs, transnational labor organizations, and transnational advocacy campaigns. For example, Cooke states, "Given the ever-widening global scope of collective bargaining and the increasing shift of relative power to MNCs, there appears to be a growing interest among union leaders across borders in forging more effective and enduring alliances for the purpose of engaging in transnational-level negotiations with MNCs" (2005, 284). The rise of global governance has also increased possibilities for unions to advance their interests before international organizations, and as stated by Burgoon and Jacoby (2004), unions are being "pulled" into the international arena.

Finally, union revitalization strategies that embrace a social union model paradigm expose unions to transnational actors and campaigns. According to several labor scholars, international labor solidarity is one of many strategies for union revitalization. By conceptualizing a broader role in society for unions, unions can increase their participation with other non-state actors fighting for issues such as health care, human rights, poverty, and the environment. In sum, the decline of national opportunity structures, the increasing availability of international opportunity structures, and the adoption of a social union paradigm have made labor transnationalism a more attractive option for unions to pursue.

These incentives coincide with a growing consensus among union leaders that “going global” is the future of organized labor. An SEIU official wrote, “The world economy has changed and is integrating globally. To have a meaningful role in the twenty-first century we must create true global unions whose vision, goals, purpose, and governance combine national interests in the same way that national unions were formed in the twentieth century” (Lerner 2007). Mine Eder argues, “Despite all of its challenges, unions increasingly recognize that labor internationalism is the only effective strategy in defending workers’ rights vis-à-vis the MNCs and the state” (2002, 184). Several recent publications on labor and globalization reinforce this sentiment. However, the challenge for unions will be to follow their rhetoric with action.

Despite the increasing incentives to “go global,” Global Unions do not seem to have benefited prominently. Interviews with Global Union officials repeatedly revealed that they are in want of more resources. Global Unions provide valuable functions for national unions, which I outlined in Chapter 3, but Global Unions are limited in their capacity to act independently on the international stage. Unlike national unions, they are largely incapable of mobilizing international workers directly. Ron Oswald, general secretary of the IUF, addressed the IUF’s World Congress about the need for “global unions” to be more than a brand or label. He said, “There’s nothing wrong with a brand in today’s world. But the world’s biggest brand name Coca-Cola has something more than a brand of course. They at least have a drink called Coca-Cola!” (IUF 2007). He suggested that a product can only be produced by workers and national unions committed to the global union brand. To date, there have not been substantial efforts on the part of national unions to increase the efficacy of Global Unions.

In my case study of labor transnationalism in the United States in Chapter 5, most of the unions that I surveyed were affiliated with at least one GUF. However, the relationship between unions and GUFs primarily involved union elites. My survey of US unions' websites revealed that Global Unions and the work that they do were not prominently featured or reported on their websites. Several US union officials who I interviewed expressed their preference for bilateral contacts with unions. Many believe that targeted strategic campaigns with other unions are more efficient and allow for greater control. While the need for global unions resonates well among many in the U.S. labor movement, it is unclear the extent to which Global Unions factor into their "vision" for global unions. For example, Andy Stern, president of the SEIU, has been an outspoken advocate for global unions. However, in several exposes on this controversial union leader, he rarely mentions Global Unions by name, despite the fact that SEIU is affiliated to four GUFs!

**Fourth, rank-and-file workers are largely an untapped resource of global labor.** In the early 1970s, Jeffrey Harrod studied trade union foreign policy in Jamaica. He concluded, "This study confirms the general finding that there is little rank-and-file control over trade unions' international activities" (1972, 396). In Chapter 5, I surveyed U.S. unions' websites for information relating to international labor solidarity. My findings supported Harrod's conclusion. Union websites largely neglected issues related to international affairs, which is problematic because unions ultimately need the support of their members in order to increase their transnational activities.

The democratic links to workers is the most important characteristic of unions that sets them apart from thousands of international NGOs participating in global civil

society, but without the meaningful involvement of rank-and-file workers, this advantage is lost. There is evidence to support the value of rank-and-file involvement. Two comprehensive studies on union organizing in 1986-1987 and 1994 “found that the use of a grassroots, rank-and-file intensive, union-building strategy is fundamental in significantly raising the probability of winning (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998, 33). In addition, the Liverpool dockworkers strike of 1996-1997 is often cited as an example of effective rank-and-file internationalism. Moody argues that there has been an increase in rank-and-file activism internationally, but these efforts have largely been organized outside the official union organizations (1997). Educating the rank-and-file about international issues and providing opportunities for their involvement would help to justify sustaining or increasing unions’ international activities rather than targeting them for cuts.

**Finally, global labor is an indispensable advocate for workers’ rights, but global labor has not yet nor is it likely to evolve into a centralized and coordinated actor on the international stage.** National unions and Global Unions can point to many examples where they have successfully advocated for workers’ rights. For example, unions lobbied for the creation of the ILO in 1919 that has since passed over 200 conventions pertaining to labor issues. Unions have played an important role in emerging democracies in places like South Africa, Poland, and Korea, and are a critical component of civil society. An ICFTU official went so far as to state, “There is no situation where a trade union is weak or non-functioning where there is a civil society.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, unions have been outspoken critics of MNCs and have been actively involved in creating monitoring systems of accountability. They have also lobbied international financial

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<sup>78</sup> ICFTU official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

institutions for policies that protect workers' rights. In sum, workers from all around the world benefit from the attention given by global labor to workers' rights.

However, overall global labor is loosely coordinated, underdeveloped, and decentralized in nature. As a result, global labor is unable to project a strong united front that can lobby *forcefully* at the international level. As a result, many of its successes at the international level also reveal its weaknesses. For example, states are not compelled to honor ILO labor conventions unless they voluntarily accede to them, and even then, the ILO lacks enforcement power (Wilkinson 2002). Furthermore, even when MNCs are pressured to recognize unions, they cannot be compelled to negotiate fairly with them. In some cases, after workers have successfully organized, MNCs have closed factories in response (Armbruster-Sandoval 2003). Likewise, although MNCs are increasingly adopting corporate codes of conducts, many of these conducts are self-governed and lack independent monitoring or enforcement functions. MNCs have also successfully resisted efforts to conduct multinational collective bargaining with unions.

Ironically, the fact that global labor represents such a wide breadth and diverse global workforce is an attribute that also contributes to its impotency at the international level. Mancur Olson (1965) argued that the collective action problem is particularly endemic to large groups that do not have coercive inducements to act in their common interest. The sum of global labor is comprised of thousands of national union organizations spanning the entire globe and thirteen Global Unions. Global Unions, which embody the interests of global labor, are prevented from compelling unions to act in concert by their obligation to respect the autonomy of national unions. As such, global labor will not evolve into a centralized actor on the international stage due to its inherent

structural weaknesses; however, it will continue to coalesce around workers' rights issues that are broadly conceived and supported by most national union organizations. If global labor did not exist, the democratic rights of workers around the world would be jeopardized even more.

### **Areas for Potential Growth**

Despite the weaknesses of global labor, there are potential areas for global labor to increase its effectiveness at the international level. Of course, change does not come easily to entrenched bureaucracies (Michels 1962). However, unions have shown their capacity to reform and restructure, especially when faced with challenges (Voss and Sherman 2000). In this section, I identify three areas of potential growth: 1) increased engagement with global civil society; 2) reforming Global Unions; and 3) adoption of complex labor transnationalism.

**Global labor could strengthen its role in global civil society by increasing its partnerships with NGOs and becoming more engaged in global social movement unionism.** Building coalitions with NGOs has been cited as a union revitalization strategy, but some unions are hesitant to partner with NGOs, especially when NGOs claim to be speaking on behalf of workers. Rainer Braun and Judy Gearhart argue, "Trade unions see an ongoing presence by NGOs as a threat to their exclusive legitimacy to represent workers" (2004, 193). Although many NGOs have close ties to unions and share mutual interests, the cooperation of these two actors cannot be taken for granted. Addressing a crowd of unionists, David Spooner, general secretary of the International Federation of Workers' Education Association warned:

There are some within the trade union movement who remain deeply skeptical about the need to form alliances and cooperation with NGOs – and vice versa – often for good reasons. We are attempting to bridge deep differences of organizational culture and traditions of democratic practice. A trade unionist, meeting an NGO for the first time, is likely to ask immediately, “To whom are you accountable? Where do you get your finance? Who determines your policies?” An NGO activist, meeting a trade union for the first time, is equally likely to ask, “What are you doing to fight world poverty? Where is your commitment to women, to the unemployed, to the environment?” And so on. (Spooner 2004).

Many union leaders harbor deep suspicions of the motives and legitimacy of NGOs. On the other hand, Waterman has critiqued attempts by unions to reach out to NGOs. He argues that unions are not interested in dialogue but instead assert themselves as the leaders of civil society and expect NGOs to accommodate their goals to those of organized labor (Waterman 2005).

Despite these differences, unions have a lot more in common with NGOs than they realize (Compa 2004). In fact, they can mutually benefit from each other. NGOs offer expertise and knowledge that can be particularly useful in campaigns, and they can sometimes operate more effectively in areas where unions are repressed or where unions are dominated by the state (Hale 2004). A former ICFTU employee who worked with Oxfam and the Clean Clothes Campaign on the Play Fair campaign explained that Oxfam was particularly helpful in developing a well-organized campaign methodology, while the Clean Clothes Campaign was particularly effective in gathering intelligence in the field. He also remarked that unions were considered a “prize” in transnational advocacy networks because they are the largest, most democratic element in civil society.<sup>79</sup> An EI official believed that NGOs were very creative at finding resources to help finance

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<sup>79</sup> Former ICFTU official, interview, April 27, 2005, The Hague, Netherlands

campaigns.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, unions can help educate NGOs about existing legal frameworks that can be used to draw attention to workers' rights.<sup>81</sup> Not to mention, unions offer access to their organized workers who can be potentially mobilized to support campaigns.

There are numerous examples of unions and NGOs effectively cooperating with each other. The journal, *Development in Practice*, devoted its February 2004 issue on the potential benefits (and complexities) of union-NGO cooperation. In the United States, William A. Douglas *et al* (2004) argues that unions and NGOs are the “eyes and ears” that monitor international labor standards and their joint efforts have resulted in U.S. legislation to enforce compliance. Turner (2006) found that coalitions such as the U.S. Steelworkers alliance with the Sierra Club are a promising source of union revitalization in part because they can expand opportunities for rank-and-file involvement. Unions are becoming more aware that the growth of NGOs cannot be ignored. Fred Van Leeuwen, general secretary of EI, wrote, “We in the union movement often are skeptical about non-governmental groups. Some of us may look down our noses at them because they are often one-issue campaigns, with no membership base and no credible forms of internal democracy. But they do have an impact when they are seen to be acting faster than unions and show more flexibility in policy” (White 2006, 188).

Engaging other actors in global civil society is a gateway to global social movement unionism. Unions from the Global South, including Brazil, South Korea, and South Africa, are credited with popularizing global social movement unionism (Ramasamy 2005). Global social movement unionism, also referred to as new labor

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<sup>80</sup> EI official, interview, January 27, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

<sup>81</sup> ICFTU official, interview, March 18, 2005, Brussels, Belgium

internationalism, represents an alternative and more radical response to globalization.

Lambert and Webster argue:

GSMU may be said to exist when unions move beyond their traditional workplace boundaries to form alliances with other civil society movements within the nation state, whilst at the same time creating a new global union form. The latter transcends the nation-state by linking internationally with similar unions with the express goal of global campaigning as a new form of resistance to globalization (2001, 350).

It is based on the notion that globalization has spawned a worldwide counter movement of resistance, which Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith (2000), describe as “globalization from below.” Brecher, Costello, and Smith reject the anti-globalization label and instead argue that globalization from below is an effort “to bring about sufficient democratic control over states, markets, and corporations to permit people and the planet to survive and begin to shape a viable future” (2000, 67).

Global social movement unionism puts forth an alternative vision of globalization that includes an important role for unions. Defensive tactics in response to globalization only serve to legitimate unions as peripheral actors, but a more proactive engagement with global civil society can reassert unions’ claim as important actors in civil society. However, the move towards “new” labor internationalism will not be easy. As outlined earlier, unions remain skeptical about being too involved with NGOs. In addition, involvement with transnational advocacy campaigns can be time consuming and expensive as well as be a potential distraction from the “bread and butter” issues. Furthermore, the commitment and priorities of multiple actors in transnational campaigns can vary significantly undermining transnational campaigns (Ghigliani 2005). Alternatively, if global labor does not become more engaged in global civil society, it risks losing opportunities to increase contacts with other social movements. Although the

pitfalls and challenges are real, global social movement unionism can be a potential source of renewed activism among rank-and-file members, and it can introduce new thinking and strategies to common problems.

**Global labor could also be strengthened by increasing the role of Global Unions.** To accomplish this, several reforms could be implemented. First, GUFs should be granted full member status in the ITUC. Currently, they are non-voting participant observers who are invited to attend ITUC congresses and executive committees meetings. Although the Council of Global Unions was created in 2007 to better coordinate Global Unions' activities, the international labor movement is not consolidated under a single transnational labor organization. Edo Fimmen, who was secretary general of the ITF, argued for greater consolidation in 1924, "The I.F.T.U. would then represent both the national and the international fusions of the national trade unions" (1924). Fimmen believed that ITSs could eventually do what national unions had done for workers and he resented the subordinate role accorded to the ITSs by the IFTU. His efforts were obviously unsuccessful, but a former IUF general secretary has expressed support for this reform (Gallin 2002). Inviting GUFs as full members would help to legitimize the ITUC as the singular voice for global labor at the international level.

Second, measures are needed to increase access to and the involvement of rank-and-file workers with Global Unions. The mobilization of mass membership is a potential tool that can be wielded effectively by national unions. However, it is no secret among international organizations and MNCs that Global Unions are essentially powerless to mobilize workers, thus exposing the shallowness of their representative claims. National unions are in effect "gate-keepers" to their members and information

from Global Unions is largely filtered through them. One way to increase the connection to the rank-and-file – and at the same time solicit much needed funds – would be to allow the direct affiliation of sub-national union organizations. This would allow sub-national union organizations to participate directly in the decision making bodies of Global Unions and increase ties at the local level to Global Unions. National unions, for their part, could do a much better job of educating their members about Global Unions.

Third, Global Unions should institute term limits for the heads of their secretariats. General Secretaries often serve for many years as heads of Global Unions, usually until they retire or voluntarily step down. For example, IMF General Secretary, Marcello Malentacchi, retired in May 2009 after serving in that capacity for 20 years. Neil Kearney was ITGLWF General Secretary from 1988 until he recently died of a heart attack in 2009. Hans Engelberts, retired in 2008 after more than 26 years as PSI General Secretary. Dan Gallin served as IUF General Secretary from 1968 to 1997. Typically, general secretaries hail from northern union backgrounds. Term limits would introduce competitive elections and involve poignant debates over the direction of the organization. In addition, it would hopefully encourage a more diversified pool of candidates.

Finally, Global Unions should bolster their efforts to recruit the next generation of global labor leaders. Young union members make up a small portion of organized labor, and new generations of workers are entering the workforce during the “post-golden years” era of unions. Global Unions are mindful of the “graying” of unionists and several initiatives have been undertaken to court young unionists. UNI hosted its second annual World Youth Conference in October 2009, and several Global Unions have created Youth Committees. However, a high profile program coordinated and funded by the

Council of Global Unions would emphasize Global Unions' mutual commitment to youth. The AFL-CIO's Union Summer student internship program could serve as a model (Clawson 2003). A Global Unions Summer Youth program would feature global organizing strategies in conjunction with global organizing field experience. These experiences would expose youth to the international labor movement during their intellectual formative years. The opportunity to study abroad experience and gain hands-on organizing experience before they enter the workforce could result in long term dividends for global labor.

Admittedly, the aforementioned reforms are largely dependent on national unions' acquiescence and funding, once again demonstrating the inherent contradiction of the international labor movement. National unions will be wary to support reforms that could undermine their autonomy. Additionally, putting term limits on the table at the international level would likely draw attention to the long tenures of many national union leaders exposing them to criticism. However, if national unions are serious about 'going global,' Global Unions are the only organizations that can legitimately claim to offer an internationalist perspective, and without reform, national unions miss an opportunity to bolster the voice of labor at the international level.

**Thirdly, global labor could be strengthened by a stronger resolve by national unions to incorporate labor transnationalism into their day-to-day daily governance.** In Chapters 4 and 5, I defined complex labor transnationalism as the strategic incorporation of labor transnationalism in various areas of union activities. Complex labor transnationalism is based on three underlying assumptions. First, transnational relationships in formal or informal networks can result in latent benefits for

unions. Second, transnational activities supplement rather than replace national activities. Third, transnational activities will aid in the goal of increasing the political, economic, and social standing of union members. Several U.S. union officials who I interviewed acknowledged that they had to think beyond the “traditional” approach to international affairs, which is usually conceived as periodic international conferences of union elites. In the case of the Laborers’ International, this perception of traditional international affairs resulted in the abolishment of its international affairs department. Expanding the international affairs of unions to other departments will increase the involvement of union actors who are knowledgeable about international affairs.

Complex labor transnationalism is based on the premise that transnational activities are not exclusive to any one department or office in a union. Although international affairs departments (or some version thereof) are a useful focal point to facilitate transnational labor relations, transnational issues are pertinent to other departments as well, including organizing, governmental relations, health and safety, collective bargaining, campaigns, and education. In Chapter 5, I broke down complex labor transnationalism into six types: communicative transnationalism, political transnationalism, steward transnationalism, protest transnationalism, collaborative transnationalism, and institutional transnationalism. These types describe various transnational activities that can be applied in a number of situations. For example, political transnationalism can be utilized by political departments that oversee the trade policies of their respective governments. In addition, protest transnationalism can be utilized by campaign and organizing departments as a way to provide opportunities for rank-and-file members to become directly engaged union activities. The main point is

that labor transnationalism is not simply a goal of unions, but instead, it should be understood as a tool that can be utilized by unions in a number of different contexts.

A component part of the effort to strengthen labor transnationalism among national unions is the education of rank-and-file workers about global issues and the value gained through transnational labor cooperation. One U.S. union official speculated that the rank-and-file were not very interested in international affairs. In Chapter 5, I surveyed U.S. unions' websites for specific links that would direct workers to information pertaining to international solidarity or global issues. Out of 60 unions surveyed, only one union offered a direct link to international solidarity. Most unions did not post comprehensive information anywhere on their websites relating to international solidarity or global issues. Access to this information is essential for workers to understand and (more importantly) support labor transnationalism. *NY Times* labor reporter, Steven Greenhouse, who has reported on labor issues for many years, has argued union members need to be more knowledgeable and involved in their unions. He believes that every union should be required to spend 5% of its budget on "educating and mobilizing rank-and-file members, because an informed, involved membership means a stronger, smarter, and more democratic labor movement" (2008b, 298). In sum, if the power to strengthen global labor is in the hands of national unions, then ultimately rank-and-file members must be convinced that this is a worthwhile goal.

## **Global Labor and International Relations**

Despite organized labor's rich history of internationalism, does global labor matter in international politics? Several trends have prompted this question. First, the national decline of unions is widely reported among scholars. National labor movements in many parts of the world are struggling to recruit to new members. Union membership is the bedrock of organized labor and an indicator of their relative political and economic strength. Second, the literature on globalization generally views organized labor as an obstacle to the flexibility and efficiency of global markets. Neoliberal policies have targeted economic sectors that have high levels of union density as standing in the way of economic growth and prosperity. Third, while the profile of international financial institutions (IFIs) has risen in the global economy, the ILO is generally regarded as a weak international organization by comparison. Fourth, the field of non-state actors advocating for causes traditionally associated with unions has increased significantly. Unions compete with NGOs as advocates for workers worldwide. At times, this competition has spurred contempt between unions and NGOs who both claim to have the best interests of workers at heart. Taken together, these trends would suggest that global labor is becoming less relevant in international politics.

My dissertation has highlighted the weaknesses of global labor. However, I would not go so far as to argue that the final chapter on global labor is being written. There are several reasons why I believe global labor matters in international relations. First, the argument that unions are irrelevant is overstated. Admittedly, unions in many parts of the world are losing members, but often, membership density indicators are deceiving. For example, France has one of the lowest membership densities in the Global

North (10% in 2000); yet, over 90 percent of its workers are covered under a collective bargaining agreement (OECD 2004). In the U.S., 12.4 percent of the workforce is unionized in 2008, but in the public sector, this numbers was 36.8 percent (BLS 2009). In addition, unions have helped to increase wages for non-union workers in the private sector by setting higher wage standards. More importantly, unions are institutionalized into the fabric of national society. They have offices and facilities, budgets, employees, leaders, and mass membership. Unions are resilient institutions that can adapt to changing circumstances, and through the course of my research, I found that some unions are engaged in this process of change.

Second, the dominant theories of international relations, including realism, neoliberal institutionalism, and constructivism, maintain that states are the most important actors in international relations, and unions remain important national actors that can influence state behavior. Unions devote considerable resources and energy on politics. They generally have close ties to political parties (and in some cases, individual union leaders have become important politicians – e.g. President Luiz Inancio Lula da Silva in Brazil) and lobby for governmental policies and laws that benefit workers (e.g. 35 hour work week in France). Although the political influence of unions varies, unions are in effect special interest groups that can help shape states' international relations, and as long as national unions command the attention of politicians, issues that are important to global labor can potentially benefit.

Third, global labor is the most democratic and organized among non-state actors. For all their flaws, unions generally have a higher level of accountability and transparency than other non-state actors, and this is something that is missing at the

international level. The democratic process can be a complex and divisive process often involving compromise and extensive debates, which can be seen as a turn-off to some (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002). In the case of global labor, the interests of unions are not always compatible with one another, but this should not be surprising given its broad-based membership. Arguably, the distinguishing feature of global labor is its representative links to millions of rank-and-file workers, and for this reason, global labor is an important exception among the growing class of non-state actors in international relations.

In conclusion, the “voices” behind global labor speak for workers throughout the world at the international level. Global labor is manifested in Global Unions and thousands of national union organizations spanning the globe. From my research, I have found evidence that unions are increasingly drawn toward the international level, but transnational labor cooperation is hard to sustain. Genuine international labor solidarity requires political will on the part of national unions, and the future of global labor is largely in their hands.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

Throughout the course of my research on Global Unions, I conducted fourteen face-to-face interviews with officials from Global Unions, including one former employee. Most of my interviews took place in Europe. In Brussels, Belgium, I interviewed officials from EI (2), ICFTU (2), and ICEM (1). I also conducted a follow-up interview with an official from EI. These interviews took place on the following dates: January 27, 2005 and June 3, 2005. I interviewed a former employee of the ICFTU in The Hague, Netherlands on April 27, 2005. In Switzerland, I met with officials from IFBWW (2), IMF (1), IUF (1), and UNI (3) on the following dates: June 6-7, 2005. Finally, I met with an official from the Global Unions office based in Washington, D.C. on July 18, 2007.

For my case study on labor transnationalism in the United States, I conducted eleven face-to-face interviews with officials from U.S. unions. All of the interviews took place in Washington, D.C. at the officials' respective union offices. I interviewed an official from the AFT on February 10, 2006. I interviewed officials from the AFL-CIO, CWA, IBEW, IBT, SEIU, SMWIA, and UFCW on the following dates: August 9, 10, 15, and 17, 2006. The next summer, I interviewed officials from APWU, LIUNA, and UAW on the following dates: July 17-18, 2007. When I scheduled the appointments, I asked to speak to the person either in charge of international affairs or to those most knowledgeable about the international affairs of their union.

The interviews were generally conducted in an open-ended format; however, I used a common set of interview questions and asked follow-up questions when deemed appropriate. During the interviews, I took copious notes and for the interviews in the United States, I obtained permission to audio tape the interviews.