

Two forms of transnational organizing

Mapping the strategies of global union federations

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It has become a commonplace belief among academics and trade union officials that globalization has weakened trade unions. From this point of view, the globalization of trade, investment flows and finance has contributed to a “race to the bottom” (Tonelson, 2002) in labor standards. In this race to the bottom, countries are competing for the lowest production costs by pushing for low wages, long working hours and precarious forms of work. Moreover, the rise of transnational corporations (TNCs) is said to have altered the balance of power between capital and labor. Today, TNCs operate through global networks of extraction and production and control high shares of global trade and investment. Outsourcing, offshoring, plant relocations and global competition have redefined the world of labor and weakened organized labor in their traditional strongholds within the industrial sector. Taken together, these trends have taken their toll on trade unions. This is particularly true in many of the high-income countries where union membership is decreasing (Van der Linden, 2015).

However, the expansion of global capital has also led to new forms of labor internationalism and transnational labor organizing. Over the last few decades, new actors,

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coalitions and strategies have emerged which have helped organized labor to challenge TNCs. These approaches are manifold. They reach from transnational coalitions with social movements and the transnational collaboration of national unions to new forms of transnational organizing. They thereby have a focus on global value chains and worldwide campaigning. These new activities have spurred debates about a new labor internationalism “to distinguish trade unions’ contemporary efforts at cross-national cooperation from practices that prevailed before and during the Cold War” (Brookes, 2019, pp. 5f.). The new labor internationalism has been less state-oriented and bureaucratic but has rather been directly aimed at engaging with companies and employers. There has been a number of scientific publications on successful cases of transnational organizing, but also voices that criticize a “false optimism of global labor studies” (Burawoy, 2010) as many trade unions remain on the defensive.

In this changing environment, Global Union Federations (GUFs) have become a key actor in transnational organizing. Already established in the late 19th or early 20th century, several GUFs have gained new members and built their capacities since the Cold War and have become increasingly active in global campaigning, thus, organizing against TNCs, supporting national unions, and negotiating international framework agreements with employers (Croucher & Cotton, 2009; Fichter & McCallum, 2015; Brookes, 2019; Ford/Gillan, 2021). In this paper, we analyze various GUF strategies created to tackle the challenges of globalization. We argue that the GUFs are using multi-scalar strategies to exert power by transnational action. Our guiding hypothesis is that the GUFs are using specific pathways to connect local struggles with global trade union action. These pathways are strongly based on local trade union action and cannot simply be replicated without high local associational power. By drawing on the cases of the Woodworkers International (BWI) and the International Transport Workers Union (ITF), we identify a network based-form of transnational organizing focusing mainly on collective action within company or industry-wide networks, and an event-based form of organizing that uses a window of opportunity to wage struggles with a lasting impact on labor relations in a specific country or region. In order to make this argument, we will firstly refer to the power resources approach and the debate on labor geography. We will then briefly introduce the history of the GUFs, thereby focusing on the development of the BWI and the ITF. After some methodological considerations, we will study two cases, the Fifa World Cup campaign of 2014 (event-based organizing) and the ITF Latam Union network (network-based organizing), which were both analyzed in the framework of the project “Trade Unions in Transformation” financed by the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (2015-2020). We conclude that both strategies are difficult to replicate without building associational power of local trade union organizations.

Globalization and workers' power: The Global Union Federations

Since the 1990s, globalization has changed the power relations between capital and labor on a global scale. Pushed by TNCs challenging national and local actors, the neoliberal “landslide” (Hobsbawm, 2000, p. 403) has undermined national labor law and put existing unions under pressure. To analyze these changes, we will draw on a specific instantiation of the Power Resource Approach (PRA). This approach draws on Erik Olin Wright and Beverly Silver’s notion of structural and associational power and the subsequent discussions referring to these terms (Wright, 2000; Silver, 2003, pp. 13-16; Lévesque & Murray, 2010; Brookes, 2013; Schmalz *et al.*, 2018). The main assumption of this approach is that workers are able to mobilize power resources as a way of enforcing their interests. The PRA differentiates between four sources of workers’ power: structural, associational, institutional and societal power (Schmalz *et al.*, 2018, pp. 115ff.). Structural power results from the position of workers within the economy. It arises in two ways. First, the ability to disrupt production (*workplace bargaining power*) by strike actions, or, more general, labor unrest; and second, the possession of “rare qualifications which are demanded by employers” (Silver, 2003, p. 13) and ability to withdraw from the labor market (*marketplace bargaining power*). *Associational power* or organizational power results from collective labor organizations, which are capable of strategic action. Historically, trade unions have played a crucial role in advocating for workers’ interests. The strength of workers’ organizations can be influenced by several factors such as membership numbers, participation and infrastructural resources (Lévesque & Murray, 2010). *Institutional power* refers to labor law and the institutional rights that organized labor can draw on. It is usually the result of struggles and negotiation processes based on structural and associational power. A specific feature of institutional power is its stability over time (Dörre *et al.*, 2009). However, it is often contradictory as many institutional rules also imply restrictions to action. *Societal power* results from collaboration with other organizations and movements as well as public support for organized labor. It either arises from networks with other social actors such as social movements (*coalitional power*) or from the ability to successfully intervene in public debates (*discursive power*). All four power resources are not purely additive entities but connected and embedded in power relations between capital and labor. They are thus influenced by factors such as state action, technological change, and the development of capitalism.

Regarding the GUFs, it is important to note that while the GUFs themselves do not exert structural power their national member unions do. The GUFs are rather a form of comparatively weak supranational workers’ power that bring together dif-

ferent national unions from across the world and are able to coordinate campaigns and organizing drives. As there is no legally binding global labor law, the GUFs only have limited institutional power such as those granted by ILO conventions or private regulations such as international framework agreements. The GUFs therefore primarily engage in struggles to set up arrangements with employers, coordinating and mobilizing the power resources of their members. Additionally, the GUFs are capable of using societal power. In their struggles against TNCs, they work together with Labor NGOs, social movements and civil rights organizations (coalitional power) to mobilize public support for their campaigns and actions against the exploitation of workers (discursive power).

A specific form of building workers power is identified by Ford/Gillan (2021) and lies in the very nature of the GUFs as a transnational actor, which therefore connects different spatial levels of union action. Their power is multi-scalar “both in the sense that conflict can play out on multiple scales simultaneously and in the sense that actors can act strategically to shift their engagement with other actors to different scales” (ibid., p. 4, see also Brookes, 2013). More specifically, in their global campaigns the GUFs “combine different kinds of power resources simultaneously at different scales” (Ford/Gillan, 2021, p. 4), for instance through supranational institutional engagement (supranational institutional power), international campaigns (societal power), local institutional engagement (institutional power) and local worker mobilization (structural and associational power).

The role of the GUFs as intermediaries and their ability to connect different scales has a lot to do with the spatial impact of neoliberal globalization since the 1990s. As many scholars have argued, capital has rearranged the spatial order of global capitalism (Sassen, 1991; Harvey, 2002) by weakening the national scale and thereby undermining national class compromises. As a result, there has not only been a stark rise in spatial inequalities, but also an increasing importance of subnational entities and supranational frameworks in the governance of labor (Hassel, 2008; Kühn, 2015). This changing hierarchy of space since the 1990s has been produced by government and company actions and has put organized labor on the defensive. An important example of these changes is what Stephen Gill (1998) has called a “new constitutionalism”: The implementation of free trade and investment agreements such as the establishment of new supranational rules by the WTO, which have led to marketization and have undermined national labor standards. TNCs have played an important role in these processes as they have historically pushed for such supranational agreements and are today using the rules of treaties such as investor to state-dispute settlement mechanisms to put pressure on organized labor.

However, the narrative of labor's decline and lack of agency in global political economy has been challenged by a number of scholars (Silver, 2003; Huke *et al.*, 2015). In particular, labor geographers have argued that organized labor is also a spatial agent and thus argued that one must recognize that workers are not only making their "own histories, though not under the conditions of their own choosing", but that workers also make "their own geographies, though likewise not under the conditions of their own choosing" (Herod, 2003, p. 113). In other words, workers and organized labor tend to operate in an environment largely created by capital, but are at the same time contesting, re-regulating and changing the global political economy. When challenging TNCs, organized labor often finds itself in a David versus Goliath situation, as workers are up against powerful opponents.

Prominent examples of trade union action are attempts to organize transnational value chains or to set up labor standards for TNCs or trade agreements. For such transnational actions, organized labor is forced to bring together the local and global in different ways. In the case of the GUFs, there are different "pathways of transnational activism" (Zajak, 2017), which are based on specific global local-linkages, and which diverge in context and strategy. Regarding the context, economic sectors like transport and logistics, industrial production, or construction imply different "configurations of power resources" (Lehndorff *et al.*, 2017, p. 15) through which organized labor can mobilize for collective action. For example, tight deadlines in the construction industry can temporally lead to the high structural power of workers, as work stoppages are costly and, in many cases, companies cannot quickly replace the large numbers of protesting workers. Strategically, global unions are setting up their own transnational structures of how to engage with the local. There are divergent transnational coordination mechanisms such as single-issue campaigns that bring together different stakeholders or long-term company networks with their own staff and institutional structures. In the following section, we will sketch out two specific pathways of transnational activism, which we are calling "event-based organizing" (Fifa World Cup campaign 2014) and "network-based organizing" (ITF Latam Union network). These are both linked to diverging configurations of power resources. Before addressing these two types, we will briefly analyze the development and field of actions of the GUFs and focus on Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) and the International Transport Workers Union (ITF).

Global Union Federations: development and fields of action

The Global Trade Union Federations emerged as a new transnational actor in the 1990s. Although GUFs are not a new phenomenon, with some founded in the late

19th (ITF, 1896) or early 20th century (PSI, 1907), it was only in the 1990s that a “paradigm shift [occurred] in GUF activities from ‘cautious lobbying’ [...] in international organizations and institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO) to engaging transnational corporations directly” (Fichter & McCallum, 2015, p. 69). This shift took place for several reasons: First, with the end of the Cold War, the GUFs, which for a long time had been Western organizations with headquarters based in the EU, became increasingly globalized. They attracted many new members around the globe and thereby became more global in their organization (Croucher & Cotton, 2009, pp. 39ff.). They were particularly able to gain new members in world regions where there were formerly no independent unions (post-Soviet republics) or where workers and unions were facing repression (Middle East). Secondly, the rise of TNCs led to a general recognition among trade unions that there was a need to challenge TNCs in the globalized economy. Driven by the need to confront the increased globalization of capital, the GUFs started to claim their right to negotiate with TNCs about labor standards and wages (Fichter & McCallum 2015, p. 6). This was made possible by a third far-reaching strategic change. In the 1990s, the ICFTU and later the Ituc and the GUFs started to clearly separate their responsibilities and fields of work. Since then, the ICFTU/Ituc has operated as an organization that represents national umbrella organizations of trade unions and has mainly focused on lobbying activities for social causes and labor standards in international organizations and treaties. The GUFs have operated as organizations that bring together individual unions with a focus on actively engaging with TNCs through international campaigning and negotiations (Fairbrother & Hammer, 2005, p. 414).

Today, the GUFs have several fields of action. First, the GUFs try to negotiate international framework agreements with TNCs. These agreements establish standardized rules for a company’s application of labor standards no matter where in the world they are operating. These particularly focus on strengthening social rights in low wage countries with weak labor standards. They are an embryonic form of global labor relations, which are private (between TNCs and GUFs) and refer to the ILO core labor standards. While the first IFA was signed in 1988 between the International Union of Foodworkers and Danone, the number of IFAs significantly increased in the 2000s and totals more than 300 agreements today. The IFAs are a weak form of supranational institutional power, as the implementation of framework agreements is in many cases symbolic and depends on trade union action at the local scale (Sydow *et al.*, 2014).

The second field of action is transnational organizing and engagement in local struggles together with the GUF affiliates. In many instances, the GUFs support local struggles with resources, staff and campaigning activities. These struggles usually

take place against company misbehavior and are, more generally, directed against weak labor standards and low payments. In the “Trade Unions and Transformation”-project, several successful struggles supported by the GUFs have been analyzed such as the ITF supported struggle of the Turkish trade union of road transport workers (TÜMTİS) against the delivery transnationals DHL and UP (Birelma, 2018; see also Fichter *et al.*, 2018).

The third field of action follows a “logic of influence” (Schmitter & Streeck, 1999, p. 30) and involves trying to change national labor law together with Ituc. This form of involvement is particularly important when there are violations of ILO core labor standards and is often campaign-based. The GUFs are thus focused on trying to ascribe moral blame to employers and state behavior in their push for change. There are many recent cases of such actions such as the international activities against the coup d'état in Myanmar, which saw several GUFs such as UNI involved, or the campaign against labor rights violations at the Fifa world cup construction sites in Qatar where the BWI have played a role in pushing for changes in labor laws. In sum, the GUFs have reasserted themselves by developing a new repertoire of action in a changing global environment and through the reform of their structure, the building of new capacities and the application of new strategies.

These changes have followed different trajectories and led to divergent strategies. The GUF's strategies have a lot to do with the configurations of power resources that they draw upon. For instance, both the BWI and the ITF have developed particular strategies that are related to the industries in which they are organizing. The BWI has more than 356 members in 127 nation states (2017). It emerged out of a merger of the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW) and the World Federation of Building and Wood Workers (WFBW) in 2005. The global construction business of today is dominated by TNCs such as Skanska or Vinci and is heavily reliant on labor migration from low-wage countries. In the 2010s, the BWI developed a new strategy for the globalizing construction business. One of its main activities is organizing at major international sporting events such as the Olympic Games and the Fifa World Cup. Huge amounts of construction work is necessary for these events that involves tens of thousands of workers. Furthermore, mega sporting events draw public attention at a global scale. In the period leading up to such events, local power resources are characterized by a temporal boost of structural power because of tight deadlines for construction works, as well as high discursive power as international civil society tends to be aware of labor rights violations.

The ITF, in turn, was already founded in 1896 and has repeatedly created transnational solidarity networks of transport workers throughout its history. For instance, ITF was quite engaged in supporting workers' resistance against fascism in Germany.

Today, the ITF has more than 700 affiliated unions in over 150 countries (2018). The transport and logistics business is essential for today's flexible global production networks and just-in-time production, as well as international passenger transport, which has skyrocketed over the last few decades. The ITF is therefore not only focused on the local struggles of transport workers, but has also been successful in organizing transnational union networks in the transport sector since the 1990s (on maritime shipping: Lillie, 2005). In the case of the aviation industry, for instance, the ITF challenges TNCs by creating company networks (Latam, Ryan Air etc.). This is made possible due to the high structural (or logistical) power of transport workers, as the flight business is vulnerable to work stoppages, and the fact that the highly mobile workforce (e.g. flight attendants, pilots) facilitates transnational organizing (associational power). Taken together, these diverging contexts lead to different types of organizing with an event-based mode being implemented by the BWI and a network-based type being advanced by ITF. Both of these are only possible due to local trade union action.

Methods: qualitative research and public sociology

The paper draws on results of the first funding period of the "Trade Unions in Transformation" project initiated by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, which consisted of 26 case studies on union renewal worldwide. The cases in the project were selected as success stories of workers building power in different economic sectors and world regions. In most of these case studies, a deep crisis of the organization and/or a profound change of context triggered union renewal, as actors within the unions reflected upon this situation and began to test new strategies and methods such as organizing and campaigning or creating new organizational forms (Fichter et al., 2018). Among the case studies on transnational organizing of the project, 11 case studies engaged with GUFs ranging from ITF, BWI, UNI to IndustriALL¹. All of the studies used the power resources approach (PRA) as their analytical framework to theorize and reflect upon the strategies of the unions (Schmalz *et al.*, 2018). The project also adopted a "public sociology" (Burawoy, 2005) approach by bringing together the authors of the studies with the unions they were analyzing.

The two cases presented in this article (ITF Latam Union network and BWI's 2014 World Cup Campaign) were selected for conceptual reasons. They are both success

1. The project was facilitated by the vast international network of FES with offices in more than 100 countries. A call for papers was distributed through these offices which helped to identify case studies. A steering committee with international scientists and FES staff selected, guided and reviewed the studies.

stories of transnational organizing and GUF engagement and show the crucial role of local associational power. However, the cases are taken from different industries (air transport and construction) and had different GUFs (ITF and BWI) engaging within them. Consequently, the organizing strategies have built on divergent sectoral configurations of power resources. Similar strategies have been applied in other cases in the respective sectors such as in the Ryan Air organizing drive of 2017/18 in Europe and the Olympics in Brazil 2016. We therefore describe these two forms of transnational organizing (event-based organizing and network-based organizing) as ideal types in a Weberian sense (Weber, 1978), as there are also hybrid forms of these types of union engagement.

The first case study on the BWI's 2014 World Cup Campaign was conducted by one of the authors through the use of semi-structured interviews with BWI-affiliated union leaders from ten host cities of the 2014 World Cup, and through the collection and examination of campaign documents, agendas for negotiations, collective bargaining agreements, and media reports. For the second case study on the ITF Latam Union Network, the two authors conducted eight interviews with union leaders from LAN Peru and lan Argentina between July and August 2016. Additional semi-structured interviews with five ITF representatives who work with the network were added in January and February of 2017. Besides these interviews, secondary data such as campaign documents and company data were included. The study was facilitated by the work of two authors within the ITF Latam Union Network who had privileged access to the internal workings of the network, its member unions, and Latam Airlines itself.

Fifa World Cup 2014: BWI's decent work campaign towards and beyond 2014

Since the 2000s, the BWI and other GUFs have recognized that mega sporting events such as the Fifa World Cup have become a trigger for opening national economies to TNCs and investors. The host countries are obliged to invest heavily in infrastructure and to grant legal guarantees to investors such as tax exemptions without any need of mentioning workers' rights. In the run-up to the Olympics in Athens 2004, the "Play Fair campaign" was coordinated by NGOs and GUFs to push through international labor standards for the production of sporting goods and the work being done at the construction sites and in the stadiums (Timms, 2012). During the 2012 London Olympics, a similar campaign achieved positive results such as an agreement between British trade unions and the Olympics organizing committee that demonstrated the ability of trade unions to influence the employment conditions of subcontracting companies. Prior to the World Cup 2010 in South Africa,

the BWI organized, for the first time, a campaign for the improvement of working conditions during the preparations for the World Cup. As a result of the Decent Work Towards and Beyond 2010 Campaign, Fifa agreed to invite trade unions to participate in inspections at various construction sites. The campaign contributed to an increasing awareness of the working conditions at these sites. Moreover, there was an increase of 39 per cent in union membership in the industry between 2006 and 2009 and a 12 per cent wage hike in the construction sector after a nationwide strike in July 2009.

The Fifa World Cup 2014 campaign in Brazil took place in a positive environment for trade union action (Rombaldi, 2017; 2019). Firstly, the huge infrastructure projects worth 8.3 billion Reais included work on 12 airports, 6 ports, 44 urban transport projects and 12 stadiums. According to the Ministry of Sports (2010), the World Cup was expected to create around 330,000 permanent jobs between 2009 and 2014, in addition to 380,000 temporary jobs in 2014 due to the Olympics 2016. However, there were significant construction delays. By May 2012, local media estimated that only 25 per cent of the tenders for urban transport projects had been completed and that 41 per cent of all construction projects for the World Cup had not yet been started, which thus put huge pressure on the World Cup organizing committee. In the years prior, the PAC (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento) had already set up a number of projects, which had led to a tight labor market in the Brazilian construction sector and precipitated a wave of wildcat strikes in 2011 (Nowak 2019, pp. 193ff.). Also, the Rousseff Government (2011-2016) led by the Workers Party (PT) was closely connected to unions and therefore sensitive to the campaigning activities. In sum, the Brazilian construction workers had a particularly high level of structural power before the World Cup due to time constraints and political concerns.

Building on the experiences in South Africa, the BWI launched the Campaign for Decent Work Towards and Beyond 2014. The campaign was highly successful in bringing together construction unions of different political orientations and they used the struggle for labor rights at the Fifa World Cup as a common cause for joint political action (Rombaldi, 2019, pp. 59ff.). While in 2010 there were only 5 Brazilian unions affiliated with BWI, the number increased to 25 by December 2012. The BWI was active as a coordination platform for exchanging information about strikes and local agreements, the creation of campaign materials; and the promotion of meetings between unions, World Cup organizers, government representatives and ILO officials, as well as negotiations with Fifa officials. This pragmatic approach not only helped to overcome the political divides of the highly fragmented Brazilian trade union system, but also created structures to organize the campaign together

with NGOs such as Streetnet² while discussing a common agenda. A steering committee, which included all affiliated unions, created a strategic consensus and a unified national agenda. This was unprecedented as it combined the demands of all Brazilian construction unions including a national minimum wage for construction workers, an improvement in health and safety standards, and an increase in pay for overtime and night work. The main strength of the BWI engagement was its multi-scalar approach: The unions could refer to the transnational union BWI as a neutral global arena where, according to a Brazilian union leader, “only the issues prone to consensus were discussed [...] Nonnegotiable differences were set aside” (interview, union leader). Also, the national campaign and agenda was an important point of reference for local unions and their struggles. BWI’s event-based organizing approach was successful in connecting the local, national and global scale and thereby bypassing some flaws of the fragmented Brazilian trade union system.

The results of the campaign were contradictory. The BWI and its affiliates did not reach a collective agreement with the National Industry Confederation (CNI) or with Fifa to be invited to participate in the inspections at construction sites, as was the case for the 2010 Fifa World Cup in South Africa. However, the common national agenda was helpful for unions looking to push their claims forward on a local scale. Many of the interviewed union leaders argued that local demands found more support in the negotiations when they converged with the claims brought up in national negotiations. As a result, the BWI affiliates were able to negotiate successfully in the 12 World Cup host cities. All of the wage agreements reached between 2009 and 2013 achieved minimum wage and regular wage increases that were larger than both the inflation rate and the readjustment of the national minimum wage (Dieese, 2014). Although there was a variation in wage increases between construction sites, there have been further achievements such as increases in meal subsidies, overtime pay and transportation subsidies. The positive results of the local negotiations were possible due to a strike wave between 2011 and 2014. Over this time period, 28 strikes took place at construction sites, with many of them being spontaneous conflicts over working conditions such as in the Maracanã (which was about rotten food and a work accident). There was a lack of coordination between the strikes, although local unions were successful in pushing the claims brought up by striking workers, as well as rumors of a national general strike in the construction sector. In sum, the Brazilian unions were successful for several reasons. The tight labor market and deadlines of the construction sector led to workers temporally hav-

2. Streetnet is the International Alliance of Street Vendors and promotes information campaigns about the situation of street vendors and practical organizing and advocacy strategies.

ing high structural power. Moreover, the BWI's campaign successfully increased the discursive power of the affiliated unions due to their common goals and increasing public awareness about the working conditions at the construction sites. The local unions seized this window of opportunity to push their claims.

After the Brazilian world cup 2014, BWI continued to follow the event-based organizing approach for their campaigns. However, it turned out to be difficult to replicate the experiences of the 2014 Fifa World Cup 2014. In the case of the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, the organizing campaign was more difficult because construction workers in Rio are represented by two unions (SITRAICP and Sintraconst), which do not work together (Rombaldi, 2017, pp. 10f.). Although the overall setting was similar to 2014, Sintraconst did not join the coordinated action. Likewise, there have been limits to adopting a similar approach for the World Cup events in Russia (2018) and Qatar (2022). In both cases, local associational power has been fairly limited, as Russian state unions avoided challenging the Russian state, while in Qatar migrant workers are not allowed to join a union. In the case of Qatar, BWI changed its strategy together with Ituc to push for reforms of the labor law. They have almost exclusively been using their discursive power for this purpose (Ford & Gillan, 2021). Although this strategy has seen some successes, with reforms such as the implementation of a minimum wage, international media has continued to report far-reaching labor rights violations with the Guardian reporting that 6.500 construction workers have died over the last decade while building Qatar's infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup. With the Covid pandemic, BWI's organizing strategy for mega sporting events has taken a new direction. It now focuses on defending collective agreements, preventing lay-offs and on implementing workplace health and safety standards. In the case of Qatar, for instance, BWI has pushed to improve health standards for migrant workers and has jointly conducted occupational health and safety inspections in workers' accommodation facilities and stadium project sites alongside Qatar's Supreme Committee on Delivery and Legacy.

The ITF Latam Union Network

In the last few decades, the ITF supported the creation of union networks to challenge poor working conditions in transnational aviation and transport companies. One of the most successful cases in Latin America is the ITF Latam Union Network (Red Sindical Latam ITF), an international network of workers which has been strong enough to force Latam, the largest transnational aviation company in South America, to make far-reaching improvements in working conditions for its thousands of aviation workers (Feller/Conrow, 2017). In 2018, Latam Airlines provided pas-

senger services to 24 countries and cargo services to 29 countries. Latam's revenue was about US\$ 9.6 billion, and it employed approximately 47,000 workers. Latam, which is headquartered in Santiago, Chile, has a notorious reputation as being an extremely anti-union company that tries to disrupt any attempts by workers to form a union or collectively negotiate for higher wages and improved working conditions.

The Latam Union Network began in 2006, with a first meeting in Lima, Peru. The network expanded quickly and now includes 36 unions and five union federations in seven Latin American countries. It holds two international meetings a year that are attended by Latam union leaders and serves as a platform where practical information, skills and analysis are shared, and collective plans are made to assist each of the unions in confronting the company. Currently, they receive no external funding, but the network was originally funded by the ITF, the Dutch Trade Union Confederation (FNV Mondiaal) and FES. The network has already supported the negotiations of over 60 collective bargaining agreements. Despite companywide union busting, eleven new unions have been created. For their local work, the Latam Network unions have used the ITF curriculum on organizing and strategic campaigning.³ Between 2008 and 2014 alone, union membership at Latam tripled. The basis for this dynamic development has been a process of organizational learning where network members learn from each other's experiences. The activities at the biannual international network meetings include strategic research of the company, sharing organizing methodologies, and planning joint activities. The culture of solidarity and learning has been crucial for building trust and resilient ties between the unions in the region and can be perceived as a process of building supranational associational power. The network has continued to hold monthly meetings during the Covid pandemic and the Latam unions continue to support each other and coordinate campaigns at the international and local levels.

The Latam Union Network was particularly successful in providing support for local struggles through its member unions. One case is the struggle of the LAN Peru mechanics and technicians' union (Sitalanpe) for higher wages and an end to temporary contracts. By 2012, the mechanics and technicians at LAN Peru had not received a wage increase in over 10 years. Before starting their campaign and struggle, the workers prepared by systematically educating the base and gathering information about the company and learning about organizing strategies from other Latam unions in the network. Working together, the Latam mechanics unions in the region signed a cooperation agreement and made a commitment between bases not

3. For more information see: <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/training-education/organising-manual-0> and <https://www.itfglobal.org/en/training-education/developing-strategic-campaigns>

to break their strikes (Feller & Conrow, 2017, p. 9). When the negotiations began in early 2014, the organizing campaign focused on deepening personal relationships between workers and on providing information about their legal rights and strategies for engaging the company.

Latam reacted to the organizing drive by hiring additional workers on temporary contracts, firing several protesting workers, and trying to buy the workers off with a significant bonus offer of 6,000 US dollars for each worker. The company then selected twenty supervisors and senior mechanics and created a new company union (yellow union) that could negotiate for the mechanics. An interviewed LAN Peru mechanic described the new union as an attempt to divide the workforce along gender lines: “Those who were selected to form the new yellow union were arrogant and sexist. They used to say, “you work like a girl’ – pejoratively – without caring about the women mechanics who are our comrades” (interview, mechanic). As a reaction, the organizing campaign started to hold assemblies with all workers and implemented a “work-to-rule action”. Sitalanpe organized marches and pickets in front of the company headquarters that included the workers, their families and other Peruvian unions. Latam mechanics from Brazil, Chile and Colombia travelled to Lima to join the marches. Chilean union leaders spoke to the workers about the importance of Chilean and Peruvian mechanics remaining united. LAN Chile mechanics were also under threat because the company was attempting to cut costs by moving the repair of their large aircraft to Lima. Additional international actions took place in Miami and across a number of airports in Chile, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Brazil and Ecuador, which informed passengers about upcoming delays and cancellations of flights (Feller/Conrow, 2017, p. 10). Latam’s anti-union actions aimed at breaking the campaign by threatening to sue the Peruvian union in the US and by exerting pressure on workers to leave the union.

In May 2014, after much workplace organizing and campaigning, Sitalanpe finally unanimously voted for a strike. The attempt of the company to bring in Chilean mechanics to replace the unionized workers failed. As the World Cup 2014 in Brazil was approaching, the campaign also received support from the Brazilian Latam unions, which exerted additional pressure onto the company. At the final hour, and just before the start of the World Cup, an agreement was reached by the Peruvian Ministry of Labor and Sitalanpe had won without a strike. The workers unanimously ratified a four-year agreement that included all temporary workers being given fixed term contracts and the rehiring of fired workers. A majority of the workers received salary increases of 50 per cent or more in along with a signing on bonus.

The struggle of the Peruvian mechanics shows that despite workers’ and unions’ high structural power (threatened work stoppages and disruptions) and societal

power (international campaign), success was only possible because of a long process of building associational power at LAN Peru itself. The organizing campaign helped to create an identity and foster high participation among workers. The Latam Union Network supported this process by creating solidarity between other Latam unions in the region. Consequently, ITF's network-based organizing approach was highly efficient in linking the local, national and regional scales and it thereby weakened international competition between different sites and prevented potential divisions across national lines. The network also became an important example for other campaigns and company networks in the aviation industry and the work of the Latam Union Network has been shared with unions across the world (Conrow *et al.*, 2011). For instance, the unionization of Ryan Air followed a comparable network-based organizing approach (Boewe *et al.*, 2021), while the ITF's campaign at Qatar airways turned out to be more complicated due to a lack of associational power on the local scale. Moreover, although they are often considered as a best practice-case for the aviation industry, the Latam Union Network is facing new challenges today. Due to the impact of the Covid-19-pandemic, which caused airline passenger transport to collapse in 2020, the company had to file for bankruptcy (using the procedure of chapter 11 bankruptcy protection by US law).⁴ Latam enforced massive layoffs and illegally cut wages by 50%. Currently, the Latam Union Network is campaigning against these measures through social media (#NoALaExtorsionLatam) and is analyzing the bankruptcy process, as Latam is expected to exit bankruptcy by 2021.

Conclusion: Transnational organizing and beyond

Global Union Federations have become crucial actors in transnational organizing, as argued in the guiding hypothesis of the article, which explores different pathways to link local struggles with global trade union action. In this article, we have analyzed the two diverging approaches of the Building and Woodworkers International (BWI) and the International Transport Workers Union (ITF). The BWI has adopted an event-based form of organizing that focuses on mega sporting events like the Fifa World Cup and the Olympics. The large-scale investment in time-pressured construction offers an "opportunity structure for trade union[s]" (Schmalz & Thiel, 2017, p. 468) for local struggles over wages and working conditions. In the immediate time period before mega sporting events, workers' structural and discursive power receives a temporal boost due to tight deadlines and increased public attention. The

4. Qatar Airways also owns 10% of Latam and Delta 21%. Both companies display the highest level of antiunion behavior and have conducted sustained campaigns against organization for years.

BWI has therefore launched multi-scalar campaigns by using global campaigning and trade union action to strengthen organizational processes at construction sites and thus been successful in bringing together different actors for trade union action.

The ITF, in turn, has developed a network-based organizing approach, which brings together transport unions of transnational companies or industry-wide networks and seizes upon the vulnerability of highly flexible global production and transport networks. The high structural (or logistical) power of transport workers due to the far-reaching impact of work stoppages in transport, and the transnational character of the sector with its mobile workforce (associational power) assists with transnational organizing. The ITF has therefore created supranational structures such as the Latam union network to be able to campaign transnationally and support the local struggles of its network affiliates.

With these two forms of organizing, both GUFs use different pathways to connect the global with the local. However, as analyzed in the case studies and put forward as a guiding hypothesis of the article, these forms of organizing only work if local associational power is strong enough to push for change (see also McCallum, 2013). The success at LAN Peru shows that a high commitment of workers makes success possible, while the Brazilian case indicates that local actors working for a common goal can achieve better results. The GUFs can support local struggles, but not replace local actors. This has become particularly true in the run up to the 2022 Fifa World Cup in Qatar, where BWI and ITF are struggling to improve working conditions at the construction sites and Qatar Airways. The two modes of transnational organizing cannot be replicated without local associational power, nor are they universal formulas for achieving success. However, they can be understood as emergent forms of a transnational unionism which have the potential to make inroads in the coming decades.

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Abstract

Two forms of transnational organizing: Mapping the strategies of Global Union Federations

It has become a commonplace belief among academics and trade union officials that globalization has weakened trade unions. However, the expansion of global capital has also led to a rise of transnational labor organizing. Since the 2000s, Global Union Federations have developed different strategies to tackle the challenges of globalization. In this article, we analyze two such forms of transnational organizing: A network-based and an event-based form of organizing. While the network-based approach brings together unions from different countries in a company or industry-wide cross-border network, the event-based strategy is built on the engagement of the GUFs at large international events to wage local struggles with a lasting impact on labor relations. By drawing on a power resource approach and labor geography and by using empirical data from two case studies, the Building and Woodworkers International's Fifa World Cup campaign of 2014 and the International Transport Workers Union's Latam Union network, we demonstrate how GUFs are using different pathways of transnational activism to link the global with the local and why local trade union action is crucial for success in transnational organizing. Keywords: Globalization; Power resources; Transnational corporations; International labor movement; Global framework agreements.

Resumo

Duas formas de organização transnacional: mapeando as estratégias das Federações Sindicais Globais

Tornou-se um lugar-comum entre acadêmicos e dirigentes sindicais que a globalização enfraqueceu os sindicatos. A terceirização, a competição global e as realocações de fábricas redefiniram o mundo do trabalho e cobraram seu tributo na filiação sindical. No entanto, a expansão do capital global também levou a um aumento da organização transnacional do trabalho. Desde os anos 2000, as Federações Sindicais Globais desenvolveram diferentes estratégias para enfrentar os desafios da globalização. Neste artigo, analisamos duas dessas formas de organização transnacional: uma forma de organização baseada em rede e outra baseada em eventos. Enquanto a abordagem baseada em rede reúne sindicatos de diferentes países em uma empresa ou rede internacional de todo o setor, a estratégia baseada em eventos é construída sobre o envolvimento

das GUFs, aproveitando a janela de oportunidade de grandes eventos internacionais para travar lutas locais com um impacto duradouro no trabalho. Com base em uma abordagem de recursos de poder e geografia de trabalho, e usando dados empíricos de dois estudos de caso, a campanha da Copa do Mundo Fifa 2014 da *Building and Woodworkers International* e a rede do Sindicato Internacional dos Trabalhadores em Transporte da América Latina, demonstramos como as Federações Sindicais Globais estão usando diferentes caminhos de ativismo transnacional para conectar o global com o local.

Palavras-chave: Globalização; Recursos de poder; Corporações transnacionais; Movimento internacional dos trabalhadores; Acordos Marco Globais.

Texto recebido em 11/5/2021 e aprovado em 23/5/2021.

DOI: 10.11606/0103-2070.ts.2021.185622.

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