



Call for Papers

10th Annual Global Labour University Conference

Sharing the Gains – Containing Corporate Power

Hosted by Penn State University and the AFL-CIO

Washington, D.C., 30 Sept. -2 Oct. 2015

The Global Labour University is pleased to announce a call for papers for its tenth annual conference, which will be held in Washington, D.C., 30 September - 2 October 2015. The theme of the conference is the possibilities of national and international regulations, trade union campaigns and broader civil society mobilisation, strategic research and transparency to limit the power of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) and their control over Global Value Chains (GVCs). MNC-coordinated global value chains account for 80 per cent of global trade, and the income from trade flows within GVCs has doubled over the last 15 years. Yet, this vast corporate income is not fairly shared with workers who produce the wealth.

This conference seeks to explore causes for the unequal distribution of wealth along global value chains in recent decades and to analyse mechanisms to contain corporate power and ensure that the vast wealth generated by corporate-led globalization can be more equitably distributed. We encourage the submission of papers that analyse the dynamics of growth of MNCs and their global value chains, and papers that explore state, international, and cross-boarder labour approaches to ensure more equitable and sustainable growth.

Seven tracks, which are outlined below, will examine the overall conference theme. If you would like to submit a paper or presentation proposal for the conference, please specify for which track you would like your proposal to be considered. (Details on how to submit a proposal can be found below.)

CONFERENCE TRACKS

1. MNCs, Trade Agreements, and Workers' Rights

The world has seen a significant growth of bi-lateral, regional, and global free trade agreements designed to liberalize trade and promote other forms of market-oriented reforms. Many trade agreements include 'social clauses' with minimum labour standards. What has been the impact of global, regional and bi-lateral trade agreements on patterns of MNC and global value chain growth, particularly as they relate to inequality within and across nations? How effective are core labour standards in trade agreements in re-balancing the bargaining power between labour and capital? Have labour rights clauses addressed worker rights abuses? If not, what needs to be done differently?

2. The Role of the State: Regulating Corporations

In theory, states still maintain monopoly control over access to their territories. States can decide if MNCs can produce within a given territory and, if so, under what conditions. States can establish rules and impose sanctions if rules are violated. And States set tax rates for MNC investors. Only states can agree on binding international standards to regulate corporate behaviour. Yet, competition among states to attract corporate investment often results in a lowering of taxes and worker protections, and corporations themselves are under competitive pressure to seek ever more advantageous concessions from governments. What have been the experiences with state attempts to regulate markets and limit corporate power for the benefit of society? What can be done by individual states or groups of states to ensure the wealth generated by MNCs contributes to more equitable development? What can make international labour standards more effective?

3. Strategic Corporate Research and Campaigns

Efforts of addressing corporate power should start by understanding corporations and the vast global value chains that they control. Strategic corporate research examines not only ownership structures, global facilities and workforce characteristics, financial information, and firm governance, but also what suppliers a firm uses, how its products are shipped and through which ports, where products are sold, and what segments of global value chains are unionized. This track seeks to explore how this information can be gathered, in part through scholar-practitioner exchanges, while also examining concrete case studies of trade union experiences in conducting corporate campaigns based on strategic corporate research

4. Human Rights, Labour Protection and Regulation, and Corporate Liability

Corporate responsibility commitments by MNCs have ballooned in recent years. The multitude of codes of conduct, labels compacts, guidelines, etc. stands in stark contrast to the persistence of exploitive, hazardous and repressive working conditions. What is the status of workers' rights and labour protection in the global economy today? And what are instruments, legal mechanisms and new initiatives to strengthen the legal responsibility and liability of multinational companies for workers' and human rights violation by their suppliers and subcontractors?

5. Precarious Work: Organizing the 'Bottom' of the Supply Chain

In many countries of the world, the majority of the workforce is employed in the informal sector and/or work in temporary, part-time jobs or face otherwise precarious employment conditions. These workers are not disconnected from global supply chains. Rather, they often can be found at the large and growing bottom of supply chains. This track will look at the conditions at the bottom of supply chains such as for agricultural labourers, garment workers, migrants and fast food employment and examine how global supply chain dynamics affects their employment conditions. The track will also look at greater liability of companies for CSR commitments and

respect for human rights and examine innovative organizing approaches such as work centres, community coalitions, and the use of social media to empower these workers.

6. Wages, Bargaining, and Binding Agreements with MNCs

The most direct way to ensure that wealth generation is more equitably distributed is collective bargaining between trade unions and corporations over wages and benefits. Yet, laws, practices, union structure and corporate power have curtailed the ability of labour to achieve comprehensive national collective bargaining coverage and progress towards international collective bargaining agreements has been slow. The 2013 Bangladesh Building and Fire Safety Accord introduces binding mechanisms and holds MNCs partly responsible for the cost of safe buildings, suggesting possible new directions for future global agreements. What strategies and policies are available to re-balance labour market power, address workers' rights in value chains, and enable inclusive and fair bargaining over wages and working conditions?

7. Development, Sustainability and Resistance

The neoliberal economic model is in crisis. Corporate investments in commodities, large scale agricultural and many industries have had a negative environmental impact. This is particular true in the Global South, and is often shaped by how countries in the South participate in global supply chains. How can economic relations be restructured in a way that leads to more equitable societies and more sustainable use of the earth's resources? Containing corporate power and ensuring the priority of human needs in economic activities implies democratizing economic relations. This requires worker resistance and policy changes to stop corporate rent seeking, to strengthen stakeholder representation within corporations, and to replace profit-driven solutions with public services and cooperatives or other non-profit institutions. Can we imagine more sustainable and equitable economic alternatives beyond 'the end of history'?

SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

Please send an abstract of 300-500 words by 15 March 2015 to Lisa Pierson at lkh13@psu.edu. Paper or presentation abstracts, in addition to indicating the conference track, should include topic, country or region of interest, argument, and methods used. Please provide your full name, title, institutional affiliation, and contact information.

We are especially interested in papers that use interdisciplinary approaches, represent a broad range of global and comparative experiences, and provide concrete policy and strategy recommendations.

You will be notified whether your abstract has been accepted by 15 April 2015. If accepted, participants must submit finished papers by 15 July 2015. Accepted papers will be further considered for publication in a special issue of the ILO International Journal of Labour Research to come out at the end of 2015.

There will be a USD 140 conference fee. The GLU is in general not able to cover expenses for travel and accommodations. However, for particular interesting presentations the GLU will consider sponsoring the conference participation. Please plan on arriving in DC during the day on 30 Sept. Conference activities will begin that evening and continue all day Thursday and Friday, 1-2 October.

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