State of US Unions &
Transforming US-Latin American
Labor Solidarity

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State of U.S. Unions
Overall unionization rate today: 11.9%
Private sector rate today: 6.9%
Causes for Crisis

• Laws (legal context)
• Structural factors/globalization.
• Managerial strategies (aggressive anti-unionism).
• Trade union strategies. Business unionism; Servicing vs. organizing debate. “Male, pale, and stale” critique.
The Legal Impact:

• Laws for union formation.
• Penalties for violations/Inspection.

Source: Anner, 2011
“Right to Work” States (dark blue)
Cannot require union representation fees
Chart 1. Union membership rates by state, 2010 annual averages

(U.S. rate = 11.9 percent)
The Labor Market and Restructuring Impact

FIGURE 15: Unionization Rate by Sector, 1983-2008

Source: Schmitt and Warner, 2009
Impact of Restructuring on Labor

- Collective action problem.
- Labor costs/Total costs.
- Product demand elasticity.
U.S. Unions Today

- 45% of members are women.
- 37.5% have college degrees.
- 13% are Black.
- 12.2% are Latino.
- 12.6% are immigrants.
- 51.6% are in the public sector!
Attack on Labor Rts. in the Public Sector
Aging Union Movement
40% under 35 in 1983
25% under 35 in 2008

FIGURE 8: Union Members, Share by Age Group, 1983 and 2008

Source: Schmitt and Warner, 2009
Solidarity Transformed

• End of Cold War; Protectionism doesn’t work. New leadership in AFL-CIO.
• More focused on core labor rights (collective bargaining, unionization, etc.)
• Yet, new challenges: Global Production Networks (GPN).
• Requires new forms of solidarity. Which?
2 GPNs; 2 Forms of Solidarity

Transnational Activist Campaigns

Transnational Labor Networks

Source: Anner, 2011
Transnational Activist Campaigns

• Advantages:
  • Use of normative power ("sweatshop" practices..)
  • Possibilities/need for new alliances (students, women’s groups, etc.)
  • Very flexible.

• Disadvantages: weak structural power (capital mobility); short-term; power imbalances.
The Case of Russell in Honduras

- Massive firings for trying to form a union.
- Honduran union: ties with US unions & students.
- Shaming brand; protests; “facebook wall attacks” “twitter bombs” clandestine actions at retail outlets; visit Warren Buffett’s house; worker tours.
- Outcome: strong union/good collective bargaining.
New challenges...
Apparel Sector: Lower Prices, Less Rights

Source: Anner, 2012
Getting Beyond Short-term victories; narrow struggles
Retailers & Brand Corporations

$1/piece

Local Workers & Union

Local Factory
Triangular Negotiations
Old “jobbers” agreements
Something between CBAs and GFAs.
-Cost of “decent” wages.
-Stable contracts
-FoA rights.
Violations by Brands
(Anner, FLA database); FoA=Freedom of Association

Source: Anner, 2011
Another world is possible.

But it will take lots of good, young, internationalist organizers/researchers like yourselves.

Thank you.
Muito obrigado!
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