



Discussion paper proposed for AAWL AGM 2008

27 November 2007

International industrial action and solidarity

AAWL considers that the experience of participating in the ILO and other international tripartite institutions setting codes and standards has not delivered substantial benefits to workers internationally.

Therefore in order to advance a global labour movement charter AAWL will promote the following strategies of international industrial action and solidarity:

a) International industrial action as a basic organising strategy.

This involves bringing the international dimension of struggle to workers who are already taking industrial action. This involves bringing international solidarity support and also requests for solidarity actions from workers who share the same employer or are in the same industry in different countries. This strategy recognises that workers who are in struggle are the most organised and most interested in discussing action to stop the race to the bottom. This strategy involves taking solidarity messages, promoting contacts, and organising solidarity visits from workers in different countries. Objectives of this strategy include developing of union to union links through solidarity actions, and activating international union structures to obtain further solidarity actions and support.

b) Occupational Health & Safety as a basic organising strategy.

This recognises that OHS is a basic entry point to union organising because it is an area where the interests of the employers and workers are revealed to be different. OHS is exactly the same issue in all countries and the same things kill us no matter where we are. Asbestos is dangerous everywhere, heat, cold and overwork are unsafe everywhere. There is no requirement to discuss a common reference point such as purchasing power or industrial law when planning solidarity activities. Campaigns should be aimed at OHS reps or workplace activists on OHS, with clear action components and strategies to link with unions internationally.

c) Union exchanges as a basic organising strategy.

Union to union links, preferably in the same industry, with regular communication through international union structures is a requirement for organising workers internationally. Regular solidarity visits will support this. Union organiser exchanges between unions in labour importing countries and unions in labour exporting countries would be effective in developing communication and promoting union membership among migrant communities and among migrant workers with temporary or irregular visas.

d) **Follow the company as a campaign strategy.**

This strategy has been developed against Toyota, Nestle and Posco. This targets a company with support campaigns for sets workers' demands, organising drives or in particular disputes. This strategy links workers in the same industry in different countries by developing solidarity with their fellow workers in another country. Where a dispute is happening in a target company on a particular issue, the international issues of the campaign should be brought to the workers in dispute, through solidarity messages and solidarity visits, to promote union to union links and coordinated industrial action. This strategy can be very powerful if unions are strong in at least some countries and they choose to directly support the demands of workers in other countries. This strategy can create the basis of a global movement charter in at strategic industries where unions are well organised in many countries.

e) **Follow the issue as a campaign strategy.**

This strategy is well tested and works well if an issue and the solution are easy to define, such as the global ban asbestos campaign. It has the advantage of being able to be activated within many different industrial disputes or mobilisations that are already happening. The industrial campaign against WorkChoices is a good example of following an issue through many different mobilisations. This strategy is has been used against manufacturers of asbestos products. It is developed on the issue of silicosis. It is beginning to be developed around cadmium and mercury products. The campaign against the use of uranium could be developed through this strategy, which would have workers central in the campaign.

f) **Follow the production cycle as a campaign strategy.**

This strategy was developed against manufacturers of gemstones and against some electronics manufacturers. This targets employers who are hidden or small scale or difficult to identify by following the product from extraction, to processing, to distribution, to sale, to use, to disposal. It works best on OHS, it can link to brand and to consumer mobilisations and to environmental campaigns. It is very helpful to link different groups of workers who may not be in the same union or in the same country, while they have much in common because of their relationship to stages of production.

g) **Follow the brand as a campaign strategy.**

This strategy was developed against Nike, Coca-Cola, McDonald's and Wal-Mart. This targets a company at its most recognisable point in the market to build support for an industrial campaign at local, regional or global level. This strategy links well with consumer mobilisations. However consumer mobilisations should be built only in support for union organising drives or for the demands of workers in dispute, not for proposed company codes advanced by third parties. Standards and codes advanced by third parties such as ILO, employers, governments, NGOs or celebrities have been used in the past to demobilise organising campaign and take campaign focus away from the demands by organised workers and towards demands from consumers which may be very inappropriate.

Sending a solidarity message and taking industrial action are both essential parts of supporting workers in struggle. Industrial action is more powerful and effective in fighting to stop the race to the bottom if it can be targeted using international solidarity strategies.

Unions which do not support international organising are preventing all workers from organising, and in the long run they are acting against the interests of their own members. Union responses to international industrial campaigns and preparedness to support campaigns for global minimum demands are part of what defines a genuine union.

International meetings

Our experience at ISF 07 has shown us the importance of having structured discussions on the issues that concern workers internationally with workers activists from different countries. But having international meetings is not sufficient. One critical question is whether delegates are genuine labour movement activists, and whether their organisation is representative of a significant sector of organised workers.

Today the international workers' movement is fractured, and organisational capacity, political perspective and union density are very uneven in different industries and different countries. Therefore AAWL proposes that future significant international labour movement meetings should be organised according to the following criteria:

- a) In order to have well supported discussions, international meetings should be hosted by genuine labour movement organisations in centres where genuine unions have considerable capacity and density, preferably during a period of mobilisation.
- b) Invitations should initially be made to a core group of known genuine unions and genuine labour movement organisations, and they should in turn have the right to invite additional organisations who they consider genuine and appropriate for inclusion in the meeting.

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