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MOBILIZING AGAINST INEQUALITY

Unions, Immigrant Workers, and the Crisis of Capitalism

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It's a great pleasure to be here in Dublin today, and I thank Noel Harvey and the Irish Association for Industrial Relations for the invitation. This is the moment when I'm supposed to say that I was deeply honored to be invited to give the 35th Countess Markievicz Memorial Lecture. But the truth is I was puzzled. As someone who grew up in California where we mainly had first names or nicknames, rarely a mister or missus let alone a count or a countess, in a country where we too fought for independence from Britain and against the very concept of royalty, I wondered why I would want to honor a countess.

But that was before I found out what the Irish know well: Constance Markievicz was a remarkable woman. Especially impressive is that she was both a fighter and a builder – a rebel commander in the 1916 Easter Rising and later Minister of Labour from 1919 to 1922. She not only fought for independence, equality for women, and workers' rights, she helped to build a modern system of industrial relations. In our era, when the tide has turned so heavily against the interests of workers and the organizations that represent them, we need more people like her, people who can fight and people who can build anew.

My interest in unions and immigrant workers is shaped by a context of growing inequality. Today's labor markets are increasingly fragmented, stagnant in the middle, with expanding low-wage, precarious workforces not benefiting from any kind of collective representation. Unions may be essential actors in battles to turn things around in the years ahead, but they will succeed only if they can overcome divisions and rally workers together in common purpose and organization. I believe a litmus test will be the ability of unions to push up the low end, to give voice and bring unity to the millions of women, young workers, older workers, immigrants and migrants who face the most vulnerable conditions of employment. This is no easy task, but as long as so many are lacking in representation, and can be played off against each other and against more settled workforces, there can be little hope for an effective pushback against the economic injustice that characterizes our era.

So my talk today has two parts: the context – the crisis of free-market capitalism – and some research findings concerning union strategies toward immigrant workers. The two parts are separate but in today’s global economy tightly linked.¹

A note on terminology: rather than quibbling about definitions and in the interest of variety, I use the following terms more or less interchangeably: free-market capitalism, neoliberalism, market fundamentalism, global liberalization. This is not meant as an anti-market perspective; rather these terms are meant to point in a generic way toward the expansion of markets beyond the capacity of society to regulate them effectively (Polanyi 1944; Streeck 2009).

Unions and immigrant workers: a four-country study

The research project I’m drawing on is a comparative study of union strategies toward immigrant workers in four countries: Germany, France, the U.K. and U.S.² Had I known the invitation to

¹ This is also a reflection of the broadening of the field of industrial relations, a field of study that became quite narrow at least in the U.S. in the early postwar period. Scholars looked at specific events and outcomes within an industrial relations system, often detached from the broader political and economic context that was shaping and changing relations of power. Internationalists such as John Windmuller, Russell Lansbury and Greg Bamber helped expand the perspective to situate industrial relations in a broader arena of international and comparative political economy (cf. Bamber, Lansbury and Wailes, many revised and expanded editions including 2011). And more recently, a labor movement revitalization literature has emphasized labor’s place in society: the linkage between workplace and social relationships, between labor and community, between actors representing the interests of workers and their families across a range of interrelated identities based on employment, occupation, ethnicity, gender and sexual preference (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Turner, Katz and Hurd 2001; Gall 2003; Cornfield and McCammon 2003; Turner and Cornfield 2007). Our focus on the workplace is central and essential, but we can’t make sense of it without the broader social context. Nor can unions mobilize the power necessary to reverse growing inequality without allies based beyond the workplace (Fletcher and Gasparin 2008; Getman 2010; Tattersall 2010; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010).

² Funding for this research has come from the Hans Böckler Foundation, Carnegie Corporation, and Public Welfare Foundation. And another note on terminology: I use the term “immigrant worker” to refer mainly to the foreign born, without positive or negative connotations. This usage is more common in the U.S. and France; the term “migrant worker” has become more common in the U.K. and now to refer across Europe to workers who move around within the European Union. In Germany, the term “foreign worker” (*Ausländer*) is still commonplace, even when referring to settled residents who are obviously not going “home.” This is changing, in favor of reference to workers with a “migration-background” (*Migrationshintergrund*; Siebenhüter 2011). Terminology is just one of the complexities of cross-national comparative research; by default I fall back here on the generic term “immigrant worker,” even as the term may be used in different ways in different countries.

give this Countess Markievicz lecture was coming, we would surely have included Ireland, and I apologize for that omission – but would love to hear how our findings in other countries of the global North stack up against events in Ireland. The work began in 2008 and has included researchers from across the four countries, producing four country literature reviews, 20 case studies, and most recently four country summary papers.³ At the beginning of this month (early November, 2011), we met at a two-day workshop in Frankfurt, both researchers and invited commentators from trade unions in each of our countries, to discuss findings and work out comparative analysis and policy implications.⁴ This is still a work in progress, nothing published yet, we are still trying to figure out exactly what we have learned, but in the meantime we are happy to share findings and compare notes with anyone who might express interest.

What we did learn very quickly is that this is a difficult issue for unions and not one that can be understood out of context: thirty years of global liberalization driven by unsustainable economic policies that have now brought us to a deep crisis of capitalism. So I'd like to step back for a moment and take a look at the crisis and its causes – the context in which the development of union strategy must now take place.

The context: free-market capitalism in crisis

Although today we worry about the Eurozone, and rightly so, the financial collapse of 2008 that triggered our escalating global crises was very much made in America. And if we look beneath the many details, I believe that crisis can be explained by two interrelated factors: long-term average wage stagnation and deregulation. In its essence, the story is really as simple as this:

³ Coordinated at the ILR School at Cornell University by Lee Adler and myself, project researchers have included Daniel Cornfield, Janice Fine and Denisse Roca Servat for the U.S.; Gabriella Alberti, Jane Holgate and Maite Tapia for the U.K.; Chiara Benassi, Emilija Mitrovic, Oliver Trede, and Ian Greer, Zyama Ciupijus and Nathan Lillie for Germany; and Mirvat Abd el ghani, Laetitia Dechaufour and Marion Quintin for France.

⁴ Trade union commentators at the November workshop included Ana Avendaño (AFL-CIO), Wilf Sullivan (TUC), Francine Blanche (CGT), Peter Bremme (ver.di), Wolf Jürgen Röder, Petra Wecklik and Bobby Winkler (IG Metall). Academic workshop commentators included Sébastien Chauvin, Michael Fichter, Steve French and Otto Jacobi. Dialogue among us has been rich and sometimes contentious, and none of my colleagues should be blamed for my own errors in interpretation. I rather look forward to their complaints.

Had it not been for 30 years of average wage stagnation and an extraordinary upward redistribution of wealth in the United States, people would not have needed subprime loans. And if it hadn't have been for 30 years of deregulation, culminating in financial free-for-all, people would not have been able to get subprime loans.

Bad loans, we now know, with no effective regulators in sight, were packaged into toxic mortgage-backed securities, to spread the risk around. So effectively did they do this that our financial collapse in the U.S. soon crashed the global economy.

In short, the root causes of the crisis can be found in the great concentrations of wealth and power that have come to dominate national and global economies alike.⁵ Concentrations of wealth that have diminished sustainable buying power and demand-led economic growth even in the rich countries of the global North; and related concentrations of political power promoting the market fundamentalist ideology that has led us into reckless deregulation and now the dead-end politics of austerity.⁶

And here I tip my hat, if I had one, to the Occupy movement. Sure, they're kids, don't know exactly what they want and you can't camp out forever, but they have succeeded in doing what many others have tried and failed to do over the past three years: change the discourse, shine the light of crisis and causation on the extraordinary inequalities in contemporary society, on the concentrations of wealth and power that dominate policy-making and threaten our economic, democratic, social and environmental futures. Whatever else may happen to the Occupy movement, it has already done us a great service.

How did things get to this point? It's a familiar story: the Reagan and Thatcher revolutions, thirty years of global liberalization, a fertile context for employers to challenge unions. Widespread union decline in numbers and influence left labor unable to prevent the spread of low-wage workforces. Low-wage work, much of it temporary and most of it lacking in any kind

⁵ For data on inequality in the U.S. and its impact on economy and society, see, for example, Mishel, Bernstein and Shierholz (2009), Wilkinson and Pickett (2009); and Reich (2010). For cross-national comparative data, see OECD: www.oecd.org/els/social/inequality.

⁶ See Watt 2009 for a concise, insightful discussion of all the things that neoliberal advocates might think would cause a crisis, but did not. Thus high wages, rigid labor markets, unions, social welfare spending, too much regulation – none of these had anything at all to do with causing the financial collapse of 2008 that has now pushed the global economy into a period of sustained crisis.

of collective representation, became the norm in much of private sector services, such as retail, hospitality, building services and domestic care, and spread also through outsourcing, privatization, and “union avoidance” into traditional union strongholds such as manufacturing, construction, transportation and communication. The politics of increasingly unequal societies have concentrated financial, economic and political power in fewer and fewer hands.

What about “varieties of capitalism”? Industrial relations scholars and comparative political economists like me have spent a lot of energy debating the continuing importance of contrasting national institutions, in liberal and coordinated market economies, against the forces of growing convergence in a global economy.⁷ Clearly, differences in national political and economic institutions remain important. Yet on many dimensions, similarities have become more important than differences. Such dimensions include growing inequality, the growth of low-wage non-union workforces, the expansion of precarious work often populated by immigrant workers, the inability of unions to speak with a coherent voice on behalf of all workers, a growing demonization of foreigners and especially Muslims in the U.S. and Europe. Germany is held up as a model, and yet inequality has grown substantially there too since the mid-1990s, as low-wage, precarious work has expanded.⁸

Wolfgang Streeck (2009), for one, has broken dramatically with the varieties of capitalism literature to remind us that capitalism’s contours are constantly contested. Exceptional circumstances in the most economically developed countries produced apparent institutional equilibrium in the early decades of the postwar period, yet stability masked underlying dynamics and lulled social scientists into static cross-national analysis. Meanwhile, the very logic of capitalism drove actors to push against, and sooner or later beyond, the constraints of regulation, even in the most coordinated of market economies. As political economists from Marx to Polanyi to Milton Friedman might have predicted, capitalism in the late 20th century increasingly burst the bonds of social regulation, at both sector and national levels in a reinforcing context of global liberalization.

⁷ Compare, for example, Hall and Soskice (2001) and Streeck (2009).

⁸ See OECD data: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/32/20/47723414.pdf>. From 2000-2005, inequality grew faster in Germany than in any other OECD country: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/25/41525346.pdf>. See also Biewen and Juhasz 2010.

Thus runaway capitalism has brought us all into economic crisis, including supposedly well behaved Celtic Tigers. When the depth of the crisis became apparent in 2008, it was easy to believe that neoliberal ideology and policy would now be discredited, that we could introduce reforms and build toward a more sustainable society. In the U.S. in that year we voted in large numbers for change. Many of us believed, and especially the millions of engaged young Americans who flocked to the Obama campaign, that with the dominant set of policies discredited and a new government in power, we could look forward to transformation toward a clean-energy, inclusive, more socially balanced society.

Well, Obama could have given us better leadership. It took him too long to figure out that bipartisanship was not on offer. But I'm not here in Dublin to speak poorly of our first Irish-African-American president.⁹ In any case, it's not Obama we should blame. Few of us anticipated the massive counter-mobilization – of interests, ideology, obstructionism, and right-wing populism – that would gather steam and choke off change in the U.S. so quickly.

But when we look back at similar crises and conflicts in the 20th century, the only surprise is that we should be surprised that transformation would be so difficult.¹⁰ After the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, it took until the mid-1930s for New Deal policy consolidation in the U.S. and until the late 1940s for managed capitalism to take hold throughout western Europe. After the economic crises that began in 1973, it took until the 1980s for the Reagan/Thatcher revolutions to push things in a fundamentally new direction. *And this is where we are now: in a sustained post-crash period of intense political conflict and experimentation* that will determine the shape of a new order, if we are lucky enough to get there. This is not the moment to lose heart.

⁹ And since the Irish love to sing, maybe you know the song “There’s no one as Irish as Barack O’Bama.” Here is a rendition from Irish Songs Night at the Starry Plough in Berkeley, California, during the 2008 presidential election campaign - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EADUQWkoVek&feature=player_embedded - with thanks for the reference to Tony Johnson, gifted Bay Area musician, philosopher, and tireless researcher.

¹⁰ Not everyone was so naïve. Here is what Naomi Klein said in 2008: “. . . rest assured: the ideology will come roaring back when the bailouts are done. The massive debt the public is accumulating to bail out the speculators will then become part of a global budget crisis that will be the rationalization for deep cuts to social programs, and for a renewed push to privatize what is left of the public sector.” Quoted in “Banking crisis, expert views: after a week of turmoil, has the world changed?” *The Guardian*, September 20.

What we do know is that neoliberal capitalism as currently governed, with its extraordinary levels of inequality, is unsustainable even as it maintains policy dominance. It is *economically unsustainable* for the weak demand generated by the expansion of low-wage work. It is *politically unsustainable* for the concentrations of power that threaten the life of a vibrant democracy. It is *socially unsustainable* for the inevitable spread of protest, of social and labor unrest, whether from the left, right, or somewhere else. And the obvious one: it is *environmentally unsustainable*, for there will be no stopping free-market capitalism from destroying the environment without a general shift toward greater social regulation.

We are looking then at perhaps a decade or more of political struggle between contending visions of the future. In my country, we have tea-party America, here it might be austerity Europe, versus an alternative sustainable society. We know what neoliberal economic governance looks like but the alternative remains less clear. It won't be the New Deal or the nation-based managed capitalism of the so-called "Golden Years," and the wastebaskets are full of blueprints. If we are to find our way to an inclusive, well regulated, sustainable global society it will be, like every other kind of social order, shaped in struggle.

The challenge to labor

If there is to be a successful mobilization against concentrated economic and political power, labor unions have an essential role to play. That role lies in bringing together the vast lower and middle segments of workforce and society – even if we won't get the full 99%. And I believe that because immigrant workers occupy a central position in the low-wage workforces that reflect the growing inequalities of contemporary society, these workers and the organizations that promote their interests must surely have pride of place in the battles ahead.

The particularities of immigration history vary from country to country. But three decades of global liberalization have intensified the pressures in every context. We have witnessed a continuing push/pull of immigration from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and South Asia toward the richer countries of the global North. Large flows of non-Caucasian - and thus more easily identified and stigmatized - workers and family members have entered both with and without legal documents. Add to this the open labor markets of the European Union that have

accelerated the movement of workers from poorer to richer regions within Europe. Immigrant workers, in spite of national policies that privilege skilled workers, typically enter at the labor market's low end, in the most precarious jobs whether they have legal papers or not.

The availability of low-wage immigrant labor has given employers a strengthened hand to push for freer labor markets and weaker unions, to play groups of workers off against each other, to fragment the collective cohesion and bargaining power of workers and their organizations of representation.

Thus the challenges facing unions to organize and advocate for immigrant and other low-wage workers are now in many ways similar across the global North – in spite of significant national and local differences in union structures and the institutions in which collective representation take shape. Unions have by and large recognized the changing workforce realities and have changed their official policies, if not always their actual practice, accordingly. The change has come gradually, driven to a large extent by the demands of immigrant workers themselves.

In the 1950s and 1960s, unions in Germany, France, the U.K. and U.S. tended toward restrictive orientations. This changed with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Starting with the civil rights movement in the U.S., and sparked by 1968 strikes in France and across Europe, a contagion of protest was actively joined by immigrant workers fighting for their own interests, against discrimination in the workplace and society, for greater acceptance and incorporation.

The role played by immigrant workers in those earlier social movements launched internal union debate that to some extent changed the face of trade unionism across the global North. The demands of immigrant workers, especially in the strike waves of the early 1970s, forced unions to pay attention and in many cases to move, if often haltingly, toward policies of inclusion. In parallel fashion, the social movements of that era included and contributed to a growing assertiveness of Hispanic workers in the U.S., many of them immigrants, with long-term transformative effects for unions and politics in key parts of the country.

Progress was slow, but over the past decade major labor federations in much of the global North have adopted policies that recognize immigrants above all as workers in need of organization and representation. In the year 2000, for example, the AFL-CIO, after a lengthy internal debate, threw off vestiges of protectionism to recognize workers as workers no matter the country of

origin – and to emphasize the importance of organizing the millions of immigrants, with and without official documents, at work in the American economy. The TUC in Britain and the DGB in Germany have done the same. Deeds do not always match words, still official policy statements are important, especially when they represent a break with the past and open the door for innovative strategy.

Mobilizing against inequality

With such forces in play, we find great problems, limited progress, many defeats, but we also find some strikingly similar success stories for immigrant-based labor campaigns across our country cases. For example:

We began this stream of research in the U.S., where some unions, beginning in the late 1980s and extending to the present, focused organizing efforts on low-wage, immigrant-based workforces in sectors such as building services and hospitality – driven by a recognition that in this arena lay significant prospects for labor movement revitalization.

Justice for Janitors, a comprehensive campaign that included strategic union leadership, grassroots mobilization, and coalition building, became a successful model for the SEIU (Service Employees International Union), now the largest union in the U.S. First in Denver in 1986 and Los Angeles in 1990, then in numerous other American cities including more recently in less union-friendly environments such as Houston and Miami, Justice for Janitors brought union representation and rising labor standards to tens of thousands of urban janitors, many of them immigrants. Hotel Workers Rising campaigns, led by the union Unite Here, did the same for thousands of hotel housekeepers and other employees in cities across the country. In 2003, the AFL-CIO-sponsored Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride traveled 3,000 miles across the country to highlight the interests and the centrality of immigrant workers in the American economy.

In the best cases, such campaigns transformed local politics. Thus in Los Angeles today, the mayor is a former union organizer named Antonio Villaraigosa, and the LA County Federation of Labor is an unrivaled political force. Ruth Milkman (2006 and 2010) writes insightfully about the “LA model of organizing and advocacy” as a potential scenario for the future of the

American labor movement. In one of our research project case studies, the United Steelworkers, in alliance with worker centers and other NGOs representing the interests of immigrant workers, is organizing a breakthrough campaign targeting thousands of LA car wash workers (Roca Servat 2010).

We wondered to what extent similar processes, driven by similar problems and opportunities, might take place in other comparable countries of the global North. The German Hans Böckler Foundation shared our interest with a grant that enabled us to turn this study into a four-country comparison. We took our research on the road.

Everywhere we found similar problems, but in the U.K., for example, we also found a successful Justice for Cleaners campaign, led by TGWU/Unite and the vibrant community organization London Citizens (Holgate 2010). In a sustained effort based in both workplace and community, the union brought in 2,000 new members from the immigrant-based ranks of cleaners at Canary Wharf and other locations.

And we found cross-national learning, as T&G and London Citizens activists brought over colleagues from the SEIU to offer lessons from campaigns in the U.S. It's strange to see European unions learning from the American labor movement, so heavily beaten down over the past thirty years. But you see we have what Alexander Gershenkron (1962) called the "advantages of backwardness" – unions in the U.S. were clobbered long and hard in the 1980s and 1990s and were forced to innovate, and especially to return to the grassroots with strategic campaigning (Turner 2007). As recent attacks on public sector collective representation in the U.S. show, we have not yet turned the tide on the decline of our labor movement, but if in the meantime others can learn from our experiments in organizing so much the better.

In Germany, we were impressed at the extent to which unions and works councils have gone to integrate immigrant workers into their ranks, especially through institutions of codetermination, vocational training, union membership and leadership development. We found inspiring stories of immigrant worker integration by the IG Metall in Kiel, and recent organizing efforts by ver.di in Hamburg.

And we were deeply impressed by the union-led movement in support of undocumented workers that seemed to come out of nowhere in France in 2008.

The “sans papiers” movement, 2008-2010

So I'd like to tell the story of a path-breaking effort on the part of a labor movement sometimes written off by labor scholars or even unionists in other parts of Europe. Our research for this project has persuaded me that French unions, weak in numbers but strong in mobilization capacity, organizationally fragmented yet increasingly collaborative in the economic crisis, deserve to be taken more seriously.

There isn't time here for proper background, so for anyone interested in more detail I have included with this paper an appendix on French unions and immigrant workers, for posting on the Countess Markievicz web page of the Irish Association for Industrial Relations.

Key background points include the following: A mainly protectionist attitude on the part of French unions toward the immigrant workers brought in to fill labor shortages in the booming 1950s and 1960s. When all hell broke loose in Paris and across France in 1968, immigrant workers joined the strikes, and in subsequent strikes and protests of the 1970s forced unions to recognize and begin to advocate for their interests. In the 1980s and 1990s, immigrant rights movements in France moved largely into arenas of civil society and were not high on the radar screens of the unions. This changed after 2006, when a movement in defense of immigrant school children gained popular support and exposed the widespread reality of undocumented workers in French workplaces.

Emboldened by public support in the 2006 campaign in support of immigrant school children and their parents, and in a context of intensified workplace pressure and fears of deportation, undocumented workers, the *sans papiers* (“without papers”), increasingly reached out to French unions for support. A few small battles at workplaces here and there convinced activist-minded leaders at the CGT, still the largest French union federation, that a broader campaign was possible. Careful plans were made in under-the-radar meetings between CGT leaders such as Raymond Chauveau and Francine Blanche and growing numbers of *sans papiers* workers in the Paris region.

With great fanfare and media attention, the campaign was launched on April 15, 2008, with strikes at 17 work sites, many of them restaurants.¹¹ About 200 workers occupied their own workplaces, while union supporters massed in front of the buildings. The key demand was for employer support for worker applications to local government offices for legal work permits, that is “regularization.” Social justice framing was brilliantly successful: these were workers with jobs, paying taxes, but without papers no workplace rights to contest conditions of exploitation. Union strategists, for example, “helped” the media to focus on restaurants on the Champs Élysées, where wealthy patrons were served by immigrants working at low wages and with no rights.

In the face of much public support for the strikers, employers reclaimed their workplaces by writing letters confirming employment status and their own demonstrated need for these workers. A second wave of strikes broke out in May, followed by many more in the months to come. From posh establishments such as La Grande Armée to fast-food KFC, *sans papiers* workers learned that with public and union support they could occupy their workplaces with less danger than they had previously imagined, and employers learned that the workers and their union supporters would not back down until demands were met.

From April 2008 to October 2009, the union claimed about 2,000 regularizations and about 2,000 new members. Still, other undocumented workers and advocacy groups protested the CGT focus on specific workplaces rather than general solutions, and the exclusion from the movement of unemployed and isolated workers not employed at target firms. The CGT faced its own occupation by dissatisfied workers not included in the demands.

It was necessary to broaden the campaign. Other unions and NGOs that had been wary at first saw the successes and the potential for more. The CGT saw the need for a broader coalition of support. Together they announced formation of the *Collectif des 11* (Collective of the Eleven, or C11), including 5 unions – CGT, CFDT, SUD, UNSA, FSU – and six NGOs – Cimode, RESF,

¹¹ In addition to my own interviews and field observations, the *sans papiers* case related here draws on Quintin 2009 and 2010; Dechaufour 2009; Le Queux and Sainsaulieu 2010; and Barron et al. 2011. Thanks also to Penny Schantz, AFL-CIO International Representative in Paris, whose contacts in the French labor movement helped launch the research in 2009; to Claude Didry, Annette Jobert and Isabel da Costa at the research institute IDHE/CNRS at the École Normale Supérieure in Cachan, who provided a base for field research in 2009 and 2011; and to the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, whose Maison Suger provided excellent research-friendly living quarters in Paris.

Femmes Egalité, Autre Monde, Droits Devants!, and Ligue des Droits de l'Homme. And on October 12, 2009, 2300 workers went out on strike, in building services, construction and catering, at small and medium enterprises as well temporary agencies that in many cases supplied the workers. Backed by the C11, the focus now shifted to the state, with demands for the negotiation of clear, expanded regularization criteria that would be binding on often arbitrary local government offices.

The strike grew to include 6,000 by the end of the year, with demonstrations through the winter and spring of 2010, high-profile political and celebrity support, and finally an occupation at the Place de la Bastille beginning on May 27. On June 18, 2010, representatives from the C11 reached an agreement with the national government that ended the strike and the encampment at the Bastille. This was not a full victory but it was a breakthrough: the government agreed to specified work permit criteria, to protect workers with applications in process, to accept the validity of the strike as a labor conflict (allowing strikers to return to their respective workplaces), and expand possibilities for regularization for temporary and informal workers.

I don't want to romanticize this movement. About 5,000 workers have received work permits – these are workers who would probably not otherwise have received them and would have continued to toil with no workplace rights. Employers and the state have been put on notice that undocumented workers are capable of successfully demanding rights. Unions have discovered new potential constituencies and strategic possibilities. But this is still small progress in an overall picture of labor market segmentation and exploitation.

The *sans papiers* campaigns of 2008 to 2010 are important as breakthroughs, as symbols, and as opportunities for organizational learning and strategic development on the part of French trade unions. In research of this kind, it is difficult to get union officials to talk about the internal debates that lead to acceptance of high-risk innovative campaigns. One point we repeatedly heard emphasized was the threat to the labor standards of all workers if some workers have no rights. In today's global labor markets, unions may be learning that it is no longer possible to exclude immigrants without papers, any more than it is possible to exclude temporary workers. The symbolic importance of the *sans papiers* victories lies in demonstrating that it is possible, through strategic mobilization, to bring rights to the most precarious workers. A focus on

inclusion, argue campaign activists, offers the best route to overcoming workforce divisions and weakened bargaining power.

Campaign success was based on a combination of ingredients similar to what we found in organizing successes in the U.S. and U.K.: carefully planned strategic union leadership in sync with active rank-and-file engagement, gaining strength in the second *Collectif des 11* period through a new focus on coalition building.

French unions are promising future campaigns based on lessons learned. And they claim that immigrant worker organizing has opened new doors for them. Like most unions, organized labor in France has its strongest base in large companies and in the public sector. Organizing the *sans papiers* has taken French unions into small and medium enterprises, into the informal sector, and into the temporary agencies that supply growing shares of today's workforces. A new focus on immigrant workers has brought them lessons for expanding their presence in parts of the labor market where they have previously been excluded.

To summarize, the recent participation of French unions in mobilizing and empowering immigrant workers can fairly be viewed as a breakthrough in efforts for broader social cohesion. At the same time, progress is halting, regularizations are still often subject to the whims of local government offices and in any case only a first step toward greater social acceptance, government and employers continue to throw up obstacles, and the Front National gained renewed traction playing the anti-foreigner card in local elections in the spring of 2011. Union campaigns in support of the demands of immigrant workers, especially the undocumented, are innovative and significant but still only a small step toward the greater equality of a more sustainable society.

Successful outcomes are possible: a comparative perspective

Divergent national union approaches are based on particular national histories and circumstances. Yet beyond the obvious differences, there are strong similarities in the fragmentation of today's labor markets, employer strategies, and the challenges facing unions. In the growing low-wage workforces where immigrant workers are so prominent, mobilization

may not be easy but successful outcomes are possible. Key ingredients for Justice for Janitors and Hotel Workers Rising in the U.S., for Justice for Cleaners in the U.K., and for the *sans papiers* movement in France include social justice framing and comprehensive campaign approaches. All of these campaigns were organized by innovative union strategists and at the same time grounded in both rank-and-file and broader social mobilization. In all of these cases, innovative union leaders viewed immigrant organizing as one vehicle for labor movement revitalization. In each case, distinctive ethnic identities were accepted and even encouraged, ironically in pursuit of greater working class solidarity.

There is much work to be done. In the U.S., we have witnessed successful union-led immigrant organizing campaigns, yet in recent state elections we have also experienced a nativist backlash fueled by anti-immigrant rhetoric that targets so-called “illegal aliens.” In the U.K., Justice for Cleaners and other living wage campaigns have rallied immigrant workers, and the TUC has come out strongly in favor of more such efforts, yet most unions remain reluctant. In Germany, unions have done much to integrate immigrant workers in their strongholds but have yet to reverse trending inequality marked by the expansion of immigrant-rich, low-wage sectors not covered by codetermination or collective bargaining. In France, a breakthrough *sans papiers* movement has been powerful for its symbolism and lessons but remains small in relation to overall labor market segmentation and the limited influence of unions beyond their bases in the public sector and at large companies.

But I want to leave you with a positive scenario based on what I think are credible causal implications. I won't claim this is a likely scenario but I do insist it is a possible one. For social scientists whose interest extends beyond molecules, it is important to understand not only how we got into this mess but where we might go from here. Not only how market expansion has overwhelmed social regulation but where possibilities lie for pushback.

We see everywhere in the prosperous global North an expansion of low-wage workforces, populated by immigrants, ethnic and racial minorities, women, and young workers, lacking in any meaningful collective representation. As unions wake up to this reality, decline breeds innovation in renewed efforts at organizing, advocacy, and coalition building. Successes foster internal union reform and strategic reorientation. Social justice framing highlights the politics of inequality and helps change the discourse that has been so hopelessly misdirected at currencies,

deficits, entitlements, and scapegoats such as civil servants and immigrants. Strategic mobilizations help overcome divisions across the middle and lower workforce segments. As neoliberal economic governance drives us deeper into crisis, revitalized unions and their allies weigh in powerfully on the side of fundamental policy transformation in the drive for an inclusive, sustainable society (Reich 2010; Watt and Botsch 2010).

Not a bad scenario, although even in the best imaginable case we face rough waters ahead, years of campaigning and conflict. As global economic integration continues to drive immigration, both legal and illegal, immigrant workers who enter at the low end of the labor market can play a variety of different social roles. They can, for example, serve as a reserve army of labor to help employers keep costs down and workforces divided. They can serve as scapegoats for the political campaigns of flag-waving demagogues. In either of these or related situations, ongoing social conflict, economic instability, and deepening inequality are likely.

On the other hand, immigrants can be seen as natural allies for other low-wage workers, and for unions and other organizations in campaigns to reduce economic and social polarization. Much current research shows that a more equal society is a healthier, more stable society (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). Union campaigns to join or lead the mobilization of immigrant workers carry the promise of a more integrated, sustainable society.

Appendix: Unions and immigrant workers in France

The dominant French views toward immigrant workers, of both unions and government in the postwar period, are rooted in a republican tradition dating from 1789.¹² Two centuries later, the two primary contending views toward immigrants, in both workplace and society, remain assimilation and exclusion. In the postwar period, unions have tended toward the former, with some concessions toward recognition of different immigrant identities and cultures. By and large, changes in union strategies that have encouraged integration, in whatever context or form, have occurred as a result of the mobilization of immigrant workers themselves. Two watershed moments provide bookends for the postwar struggles of immigrant workers in France, and corresponding changes in union attitudes and strategy: May 1968 and subsequent strike waves, and the movement for the “regularization” of undocumented workers that began in 2008.

In spite of republican traditions of equality and assimilation, immigrant workers, especially but not only from outside the European Union, remain to a large extent second-class citizens, in both workplace and society. Unions have joined anti-racist campaigns against the far right Front National and have gradually integrated immigrants into union membership, participation, and leadership roles. The deeply entrenched fragmentation of organized labor into contending federations has at times played to the interests of immigrant workers, as unions compete for membership and influence. At the same time, organizational rivalries have often stood in the way of cohesive strategies and comprehensive campaigns to organize and integrate immigrants.

Given the active role of the state in the French economy, the demands of immigrant workers and supportive unions have almost always targeted the state as well as employers.

As in other countries of the global North, the expansion of a low-wage immigrant workforce is a defining characteristic of economic globalization in the current era, as well as a central component of inequality within French society. Large numbers of foreign-born workers toil in

¹² This appendix draws on a variety of sources, including Dechaufour 2009; Iskander 2007; Le Queux and Sainsaulieu 2010; Schain 1994; and discussions of national models of integration in the 2010 issue of *Perspectives on Europe*, including Bertossi 2010.

low-wage jobs in construction and private-sector services such as hospitality, janitorial and domestic care.

Looking back at postwar history, we see a familiar western European story. As in West Germany, postwar reconstruction and rapid economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s produced labor shortages that led French governments to encourage the immigration of foreign workers, especially from the former colonies of North Africa. For most of this period, union policy was largely protectionist, including an arms-length approach toward the new waves of immigrant workers.

The active participation of immigrant workers, typically positioned in the least desirable jobs in manufacturing, in the strike waves that began in May 1968, forced unions to pay attention and move haltingly toward greater acceptance and integration into their own organizations. In a context of economic crisis in the 1970s, labor shortages disappeared and the state moved toward more restrictive policies on immigration. At the same time, in response to immigrant worker activism, the two largest labor federations, CGT and CFDT, issued a joint declaration of solidarity with immigrant workers in 1974. The focus now was to combat discrimination in the workplace, based largely on a republican model of assimilation.

Immigrant workers themselves, in the wake of 1968, continued to fight for their own interests at the grassroots, in both workplace and society. Ongoing efforts included sustained social movements such as rent strikes by immigrant workers living in state housing (1973-1980) and major strikes initiated by immigrant workers, especially in the auto industry, between 1975 and 1983 (Schain 1994). In the first case, the CGT played a major role, but in a workplace-based committee that contended for influence with a broader immigrant-led committee that included social as well as workplace demands. In the second case, both the CGT and CFDT, together and in conflict, played active roles in supporting and leading the campaigns. These and similar movements pushed forward the interests and participation of immigrant workers in French unions.

Although immigrant workers continued to push for rights and interests in the workplace, often with union support, the primary focus of immigrant rights movements in the 1980s shifted to society. The organization SOS Racisme, founded in 1984 in the wake of youth anti-racist

marches and in opposition to the rise of anti-immigrant demagoguery led by Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National, worked with the Socialist government to influence policy on immigration and discrimination. In the 1990s and 2000s, immigrant rights movements focused on schools, churches and communities, and included high-profile demonstrations and occupations. While individual trade unionists played active roles in these campaigns, unions as organizations supported but did not play a leading role in what they perceived as civil rights movements not based in the workplace (Iskander 2007).

A turning point for these movements came in a 2006 campaign for the settlement rights of the immigrant parents of students attending school in France. A coalition called “Réseau Associative” organized demonstrations that won broad public and political support – for the demand that children educated in France should not have to worry about one or both of their parents being deported. The campaign raised awareness of the presence of undocumented workers at the heart of the French economy and society – and provided the context in which public support for the subsequent undocumented workers’ movement that would develop.

Counting both citizens and immigrants, the foreign-born accounted for 18.8% of the French population in 2006 (Bouchareb and Contrepois 2009). By definition it is impossible know how many workers are undocumented. Estimates vary widely: in the spring of 2011, our union sources estimated from 200,000 to up to a million in the French workforce. While workers from other countries in the European Union circulate more freely than in the past, undocumented workers come from North (Mahgreb) Africa and West (sub-Saharan) Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia.

The political context weighs against the interests of immigrant workers. Sarkozy was elected president in 2007 in part by drawing voters from the far right, based on promises such as deportations of 25,000 per year. The government has kept this promise, with annual deportations ranging from 25,000 to 30,000 – devastating for the deportees but still small in relation to overall numbers in France, including steady streams of new entrants. In local elections in 2011, the Front National, under the new leadership of Marine Le Pen, showed growing strength, and Sarkozy will no doubt have to cater to anti-immigrant sentiment when he runs for re-election in 2012.

The current economic crisis, following many years of European integration and intensified economic competition, has provided increasing opportunities – and incentives – for employers to hire, and in many cases exploit, immigrant workers. This is especially true for undocumented workers in low-wage sectors such as building services, cleaning, restaurants, domestic care, and construction. These sectors provide the arena in which *sans papiers* workers began to push French unions for support in the years after 2006.

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