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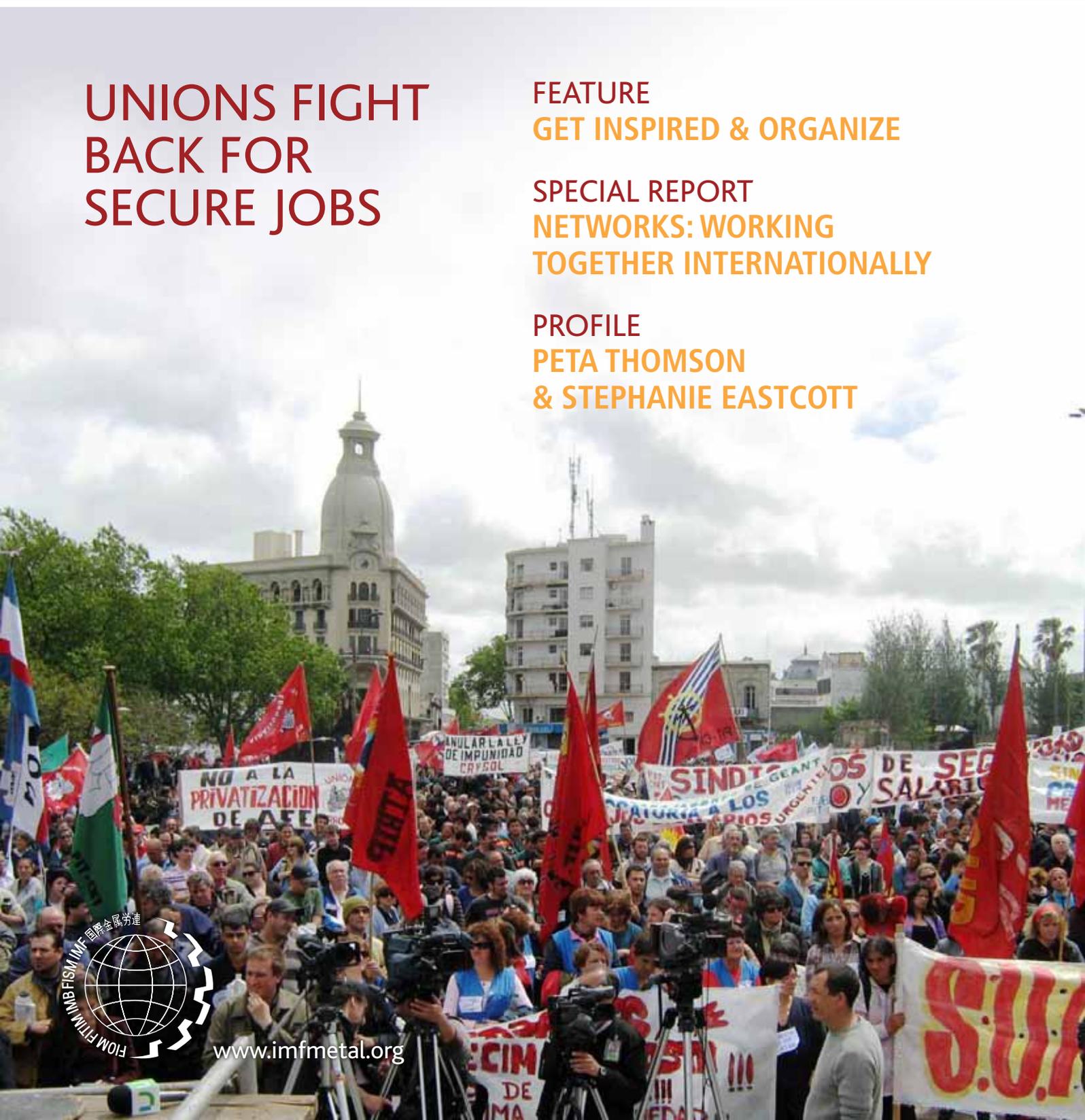
# METALWORLD

**UNIONS FIGHT  
BACK FOR  
SECURE JOBS**

**FEATURE  
GET INSPIRED & ORGANIZE**

**SPECIAL REPORT  
NETWORKS: WORKING  
TOGETHER INTERNATIONALLY**

**PROFILE  
PETA THOMSON  
& STEPHANIE EASTCOTT**



[www.imfmetal.org](http://www.imfmetal.org)



# ORGANIZING BUILDS POWER

## THE GS'S CORNER

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Organizing is the lifeblood of trade unions and the base of our power. Only by uniting our forces can we achieve good collective agreements and defend the rights of workers in times of trouble. This is why supporting organizing and growth all over the world is a key priority for the IMF.

The global economic crisis, millions of lost jobs and the increase of precarious work have left the trade union movement weakened. Several governments have launched initiatives to undermine labour legislation and social protection, and companies have taken the occasion to attack trade union rights.

As a result of all these difficulties, unionization rate in industrialized Europe has dropped to around 20 per cent. In developing countries, typical union density is 3-5 per cent.

It is more important than ever to invest in organizing and growth. This is the only way to maintain our power and legitimacy as the collective voice of workers.

In this issue of Metal World, we present success stories of growth from Russian ITUA's expansion in the automotive industry to Australian AWU's "low hanging fruit" strategy (see pages 8 to 13).

In India, IMF affiliates have recruited 10,000 permanent and precarious workers in the steel industry in a project supported by Swedish and Finnish unions, and action continues. In Germany, the IG Metall is targeting groups with low union density such as young and non-manual workers and the wind energy sector.

Organizing is easier when the union is big enough to have sufficient resources for recruiting new members and servicing them. The IMF is assisting unions to build sustainable structures for growth in Chile, Colombia and Zambia.

Recruitment of new members is the ultimate responsibility of national trade unions. But in a world without borders, organizing has become an increasingly international matter. More than ever, an injury to one is an injury to all.

Trade union networks in transnational companies are a tool for organizing and defending trade union rights. On pages 20 to 23, you see how unions at Gerdau, Tenaris and Caterpillar are building solidarity and joint action.

In numerous countries there are legislative and factual hindrances to organizing and collective bargaining, often in contradiction with the norms of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Tackling these problems will require concerted, long-term action in cooperation with other global union federations, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and national unions.

The ongoing process to unite the world's industrial workers into a new global union offers us an opportunity to build strength for organizing and solidarity through supply chains, from extractive industries to production of consumer goods. We will be stronger together in the struggle for better lives for working people and all citizens.

## METAL WORLD

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As seen in Russia, India, Zambia, Colombia, Australia and the U.S., unions that are capable of achieving real gains through collective bargaining and changing national public policies depend on effective organizing.

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Three trade unions in three countries are defending workers' rights in response to the global jobs crisis, each according to their strengths and national situation.

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## NETWORKS: WORKING TOGETHER INTERNATIONALLY

Trade union networks in transnational companies should promote solidarity and cooperation with the goal of improving conditions for workers in these companies.



### International Metalworkers' Federation

The International Metalworkers' Federation represents the collective interests of 25 million metalworkers from more than 200 unions in 100 countries.

The IMF represents blue- and white-collar workers in industries such as steel, non-ferrous metals and ore mining, mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, automobile, aerospace, electrical and electronics.

The IMF aims to improve metalworkers' wages, working and living conditions and to ensure that metalworkers' rights are respected.

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**Solidaridad**

**DEFEND TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN MEXICO**

[www.imfmetal.org/mexico2011](http://www.imfmetal.org/mexico2011)  
[www.icem.org/en/5-Mining-DGOJP](http://www.icem.org/en/5-Mining-DGOJP)  
[www.uniglobalunion.org/MexicoAction](http://www.uniglobalunion.org/MexicoAction)

**GLOBAL DAYS OF ACTION**  
**14-19 FEBRUARY 2011**

Global Days of Action campaign poster

## MEXICO

The International Labour Organization's Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) met in March and decided to take up the issue of **protection contracts in Mexico** in response to IMF's complaint no. 2694. As a first step the CFA called on the Mexican government to hold a constructive dialogue with unions and employers. The CFA also discussed IMF complaint no. 2478 regarding union autonomy and **persecution of the Mexican Mine and Metal Workers' Union** and asked the Mexican government to investigate reports of murder, abduction, illegal arrests and violence submitted by the IMF.

One week after unions from 40 countries around the world took action in defence of labour rights in Mexico, Mexican Mine and Metal Workers' Union leader **Juan Linares was released from prison** on February 24 having spent more than two years illegally imprisoned. The struggle continues for the release of Miguel Marquez Rios, of the Mexican Electrical Workers' Union, and Martin Salazar Arvayo, of the Mexican Mine and Metal Workers' Union, both unjustly jailed in 2010.



Picket at the Mexican Embassy in Moscow

Union members, students and human rights activists from 40 countries participated in the Global Days of Action to **defend trade union rights in Mexico**, from February 14 to 19. For six days, unions from around the globe came together holding actions, writing letters and taking meetings with ambassadors and political figures to highlight massive labour rights violations in Mexico. At the same time an electronic campaign was launched on LabourStart, generating more than 3,500 letters to the Mexican government.

## IMF-ICEM-ITGLWF

Forty-one delegates representing affiliates of the IMF, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF) met in Japan in February to continue examining how to **unify the world's industrial workers** into one global union federation. Task force members of the three GUFs confirmed the rationale of creating a united voice of the industrial workers of the world, and a strong counter-power to major transnational corporations.



A new quarterly newsletter of IMF, ICEM and ITGLWF on the creation of a new International

**Stronger Together, a new quarterly newsletter** was released in March to report on the joint actions and shared goals of IMF, ICEM and ITGLWF as the three global union federations explore the creation of a new unified International for industrial workers. For a copy of the newsletter go to: [www.imfmetal.org/strongertogether](http://www.imfmetal.org/strongertogether)

## TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS



Co-ordinators of IMF union networks meet in Brazil

Trade unionists from within the IMF engaged in co-ordinating **trade union networks in transnational corporations (TNCs)** came together in Brazil in March to discuss how to strengthen their role in building and strengthening cross-border

global solidarity and action. Experts on TNC trade union networks from 20 countries attended the meeting and shared their practical experiences. For more, read the Metal World Special Report on pages 20 to 23.

**Bridgestone** South Africa locked out workers at two production sites in Brits and Port Elizabeth on March 22. Calling for international solidarity support, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa) believes the company is retaliating against wage increases achieved in the new Tyre Manufacturing Industry Bargaining Council collective agreement of September 2010. Workers at Bridgestone who should receive increases according to the agreement have not seen a rise since 2009, despite the company posting huge profits.

Labour rights violations at **Rio Tinto/Alcan** in Australia gained international attention and support for the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) in its fight for fair wages, improved health and safety standards and a workers' right to join a union. The union's organizing drive at Rio Tinto/Alcan operations in Australia has been met with fierce resistance from management. The IMF and unions with members at Rio Tinto/Alcan in Brazil, France, South Africa, UK, the U.S. and Zimbabwe sent letters to the company's CEO demanding the company recognize international labour standards.

Agreement was reached at **Vale** in Canada in January 2011, after a bitter 18-month battle. Members of the United Steel Workers (USW) at Voisey's Bay nickel mine in Labrador, Canada voted 88 per cent for approval of a tentative five year agreement with the Brazilian transnational giant Vale. The new contract begins on February 1, 2011 and expires in January 2016 and includes an immediate C\$2,000 retention bonus, adequate wage increases, retained cost-of-living increases and limits the use of contractors. A compromise was made on the so-called nickel bonus.

Representatives from IMF-affiliated trade unions organizing

workers at **ArcelorMittal** met in Brazil in April and established a Latin American regional trade union network. Following the meeting, the ArcelorMittal Joint Global Health and Safety Committee visited the company's Tubarao site in Brazil and found that while safety standards at the plant are high, employee relations and particularly engagement with the union CNM-CUT need to improve. A month earlier the Committee visited the company's Acindar Steel Plant in Argentina and found that ASIMRA and UOM have built an excellent joint approach to health and safety with management at the site.



IMF Caterpillar Steering Group Meeting in Chicago

Members of the IMF **Caterpillar** Steering Group from Belgium, Brazil, France, Germany, the UK and the U.S. convened in the U.S. in March and adopted an action plan that includes improving communication, monitoring collective bargaining outcomes, reaching out to other unions with a presence in the company and seeking formal recognition of the network from management. The meeting took place shortly after the successful conclusion by the UAW of a new six-year contract covering some 9,500 Caterpillar workers at seven facilities in the U.S.

Representatives of **Siemens** unions across India celebrated the registration of the newly-formed Siemens Employees' Federation at a meeting held in November 2010 to plan strategies for the Federation which, exceptionally for India, brings together unions affiliated to different national confederations. The Federation is focusing on stamping out the practice of false classification of workers as officers, fighting for parity in wages and conditions

between plants in India, limiting the percentage of contract workers and ensuring equal pay between contract and regular workers.

IMF and trade unions belonging to the **Gerdau** Workers' World Council sent letters of protest to plant managers in March 2011 demanding an end to anti-union activities at the Gerdau plant in Tocancipá, Colombia. Sintrametal, a Colombian union affiliated to IMF affiliate Utrammicol, has worked for almost two years to unionize the workers in the new Gerdau plant located in Tocancipá. Gerdau fired three key internal organizers in February after it detected the interest of the workers to join the union.



Tenaris Workers' World Council in Brazil

Following the 3rd international meeting of the **Tenaris** Workers' World Council in Brazil last November, Argentinean union UOM negotiated a new permanent profit sharing system at the Campana plant, by which 4.5 per cent of Tenaris' yearly profit is distributed among workers represented by the union and covered by the collective agreement. The total amount is to be distributed among full time and contract workers. Three smaller plants in Argentina in Villa Constitución, Valentín Alsina and San Juan do not have the same profit-sharing system.



Agreement signed at Norsk Hydro

IMF, ICEM and their Norwegian affiliates Fellesforbundet and IndustriEnergi signed a Global Framework Agreement with **Norsk Hydro ASA** in Norway in March. The agreement covers provisions on freedom of association and collective bargaining rights, discrimination, forced labour, child labour, health and safety, wages, working hours, employment conditions, skills training, HIV/AIDS, and environmental conditions. The Hydro companies have a total of 23,000 workers in more than 40 countries worldwide.

IF Metall signed an International Framework Agreement with **Electrolux** on behalf of the IMF in December 2010. Linked to the Electrolux Code of Conduct, the IFA references all the ILO core labour standards including Convention 87 on freedom of association and Convention 98 on the right to bargain collectively.

## UNION BUILDING



IMF workshop with newly formed electronics union in Malaysia

Sixteen active members of the newly formed Electronics Industry Employees' Union (Southern Region) in Malaysia attended a two day IMF workshop on **organizing and union building** in November 2010. The participants, including seven women, came from five newly organized factories. The workshop focused on organizing, dues collection, leadership capacity building, administration and developing collective bargaining so as to strengthen the union.

IMF affiliates, FSPMI and Lomenik, participated in three workshops under an International Labour Organization Bureau of Workers' project in January to gain knowledge and skills on **organizing strategies for**

**Export Processing Zones (EPZ)** in Indonesia. Participants learnt basic industrial mapping in the locations where they work so as to carry out active organizing through the formation of voluntary organizing committees in the areas where EPZ workers are employed.

## SOLIDARITY



Damages after earthquake at JAM

IMF and many of its affiliates donated funds and sent messages of condolence and solidarity to Japanese affiliate IMF-JC, union members and their families, following the massive earthquake and tsunamis that caused untold devastation and damage to the eastern part of **Japan** in March. The full extent of the loss of life and damage is still unknown. Of ongoing concern are the nuclear power plants in the region where brave workers continue to risk their lives working to contain the difficult situation.

The IMF expressed its solidarity with workers and its affiliate as thousands of young people, working women and men joined a spontaneous call for democracy in the streets of towns of **Tunisia** in December and January. The metalworkers of FGME-UGTT asked for an immediate end to repression and respect of fundamental democratic rights. The IMF is supporting their call for full respect of fundamental trade union and workers' rights by government and employers. Together with the ITUC and other GUFs, the IMF is also supporting the new independent unions in **Egypt**.

Birlesik Metal-IS, an IMF affiliate in **Turkey**, declared strike action at 21 companies on March 22 in defence of better wages and working conditions. The companies are members of the Metal Product Industrialists'

Association (MESS), which signed an industry-wide collective agreement with Turk Metal. Birlesik Metal-IS rejected the agreement, which covers 80,000 workers directly and many more indirectly, as it gives a minimal wage increase and defers to labour law rather than collective bargaining on the issue of flexible working conditions.

Sinter Metal workers in **Turkey**, dismissed in December 2008, won their reinstatement cases in December 2010, following court decisions in their favour. The legal cases were launched by the Sinter Metal workers and their union Birlesik Metal-IS. The court ruled that the workers were not dismissed for "economic reasons" as cited by the company, but for trade union membership. This major victory came after two years of struggle and significant international solidarity support from the IMF, European Metalworkers' Federation and other affiliated unions.



HHIC workers in Korea continue to struggle against mass dismissal

Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction (HHIC) workers at the shipyards in Busan and Ulsan in **Korea** have been on strike since December 2010 against a mass dismissal plan conducted by the management. On February 14, the company suddenly locked out workers at the plants without informing the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU). The union is demanding withdrawal of the mass dismissal and actions against union leaders, payment of performance related pay from 2009 and 2010 and compliance with the collective agreement.

The Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) secured an agreement with Kiryung Electronics in November 2010 to hire the

remaining 10 union members on strike into permanent positions. The illegally employed dispatch workers at the company in **Korea** formed a union in July 2005 and went on strike one month later when the company refused to directly employ the workers and instead sacked them. The situation at Kiryung Electronics was included in a complaint that KMWU, KCTU and IMF lodged to the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association in 2006. The Committee heard in March that the government will carry out an investigation to assess the state of in-company subcontracting at 29 workplaces.

Alexander Lukashenko began a fourth term as President of **Belarus** after presidential elections held on December 19, 2010. Four trade unionists were arrested on the same night during a mass demonstration in Minsk that was brutally repressed. One month later, state security (KGB), claiming the union supported an opposition candidate, searched and removed office equipment from the office of IMF affiliate Belarusian Radio and Electronics Industry Workers' Union (REP). In March, the European Metalworkers Federation (EMF) called for stronger sanctions and an end to the oil transit from Belarus to the Netherlands.

## FIGHT BACK



500,000 strong march in London

The European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) joined with Belgian and other European unions in protest actions in Brussels in March to say **no to austerity plans**, cuts in wages and pensions, insecurity and unemployment, deregulation of labour standards and no to rising social inequalities. Other actions took place across Europe during the same week, including a 500,000 strong march in London against planned cuts to

public sector spending. For more, see the Metal World feature on pages 14 to 19.

Slovenian unions are protesting against the introduction of a new form of **precarious work**, which will substantially reduce workers' rights. The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia including IMF-affiliated SKEI, has denounced the government's proposed new legislation that will allow the unemployed, students and pensioners to work, but with less rights, including lower pay and conditions. Unions have collected more than 40,000 signatures for a referendum in April and are conducting a public campaign on the issue.

Some 8,000 people were in the streets of Bucharest on March 16, protesting against the Romanian Government's decision to introduce changes in the Labour Code that will weaken collective bargaining rights and lead to increased **precarious employment**. The protest action was organized by five trade union confederations including Cartel Alfa whose member Trade Union Federation METAROM is also an IMF affiliate.



India march to parliament

In a historic **march to parliament**, on February 23 around 200,000 working people of India rallied in New Delhi demanding control on price rises, strict enforcement of labour laws, linkage of employment protection with the economic stimulus package, universal social security and an end to the privatization of central public sector enterprises. All the major central trade unions and employees' federations stated that price rises, coupled with increased unemployment and reduced earnings through contracting out and casualization of employment was resulting in greater poverty and inequality.

More than 10,000 Indonesian workers marched in the streets of Jakarta **demanding social security reforms and an end of precarious work** on February 6. Organized by IMF affiliate the Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia (FSPMI), the demonstration coincided with the opening of the fourth FSPMI Congress. The demand for better social security and the fight against precarious work is one of the themes that will be debated at the IMF Central Committee, taking place in Jakarta, Indonesia in December 2011.

On World Public Services Day - June 23, 2011, global unions and various national unions will be announcing campaigns joined under the **Quality Public Services-Action Now!** banner. The global trade union movement, including the IMF, is calling for private and public sector unions to unite in solidarity to defend and advance the quality public services that build the strong, equitable, sustainable communities that benefit members and families. For more details go to: [www.QPSActionNow.org](http://www.QPSActionNow.org)

#### HEALTH & SAFETY

The International Federation of Chemical, Energy & Mine Workers, Federation (ICEM) and IMF again demanded **reform of mine health and safety in**

**Chile** in March, starting with the ratification of ILO Convention 176, the Safety and Health in Mines Convention. The call came after the Piñera administration reneged on promises it made to improve health and safety when 33 copper miners were successfully rescued in October 2010. The action includes a LabourStart campaign where messages can be sent directly to the Chilean government.

The Bangladesh High Court questioned employer and government authorities following a massive explosion at the Mak Corporation **shipbreaking yard in Chittagong** in January, which killed four people and injured many more. The Court directed the Chittagong Port Authority to investigate and the Department of Environment to report on whether the ship had an environment clearance certificate. The Bangladesh Metalworkers' Federation called upon the government to punish the culprits.

This **Workers' Memorial Day on April 28**, the IMF speaks out against behavioural based safety systems, which blame the worker rather than fixing the hazard. On this day trade unions around the world stop and think about colleagues who have lost their lives at work and recommit to ensuring health and safety

standards improve, believing that no one should be killed at work.

#### UNION FILMS

The **Global Union Labour Film Shorts 2011**, a one hour line-up of the best short films from around the world focused on unions fighting back against austerity cuts, will be released online and on DVD in June 2011. Over the last four years the Geneva Labour Film Shorts Festival has enabled unions and working people worldwide to share their stories. This year, in order to reach a wider international audience, the festival is refocusing to an online and DVD presentation that will be submitted to over 36 labour-related film festivals around the world.

The **"Unions in Motion"** film festival will take place on June 10 to 11, at Landschaftspark Nord in Duisburg, Germany. The event is in connection with European Metalworkers' Federation's Congress and will include the screening of a variety of short and feature films related to trade unions and will also offer workshops on how trade unions can produce films. The overall theme of the film event is the 'future of manufacturing in Europe' showing trade union films from the metal, textile and chemical industries from around the world.



GLOBAL UNION LABOUR  
FILM SHORTS  
2011  
[www.labourfilmshorts.org](http://www.labourfilmshorts.org)



**FEATURE  
ORGANIZING**



Dmitry Trudovoy, deputy president of the ITUA union local at a Volkswagen assembly plant in Russia, speaks with a group of workers.

Photo: ITUA

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# GET INSPIRED AND ORGANIZE →

Original interviews / Ilya Matveev, G. Manicandan, Aisha Bahadur, Valeska Solis and Anita Gardner

Translations / Ilya Matveev and Chris Whitehouse

Editor / Anita Gardner



As seen through experience in Russia, India, Zambia, Colombia, Australia and the U.S., building unions capable of achieving real gains through collective bargaining and having an impact on national public policies depends on effective organizing.

It is 6.30am and the morning shift at a Volkswagen assembly plant in Kaluga, Russia is about to start. Dmitry Trudovoy, deputy president of the local union, is at the gate and holding a meeting of the workers. Out of 2,000 production workers on site, 625 now belong to the union. In Russia a union needs to represent 50 per cent +1 of workers to have the right to negotiate a collective agreement, which is one of the organizing goals of the union.

Through training, trial and error Dmitry has learnt a lot about organizing workers. "Until recently our organizing strategy was: we learned the problems of the workers at a specific location, we distributed leaflets highlighting these problems, and then a union activist arrived and recruited the workers," explains Dmitry. "In the beginning this strategy was quite effective. However, in six months the number of people who joined the union was roughly the same as the number who quit," he said.

"We had to rethink our strategy and focus on conscious recruitment of workers. Before recruiting a worker, we now give a clear image of a militant union and its methods, democratic principles of organization, decision-making process in such an organization and the role and place of every member," explains Dmitry. "When we tried out such a strategy, we were very surprised by the results. It has been successful as it allows the workers to think of themselves as a collective and understand that the achievement of a common goal depends on each and every one of them," he said.



## FEATURE ORGANIZING

### A BREAK WITH TRADITION

Dmitry's union, the Interregional Trade Union of Autoworkers (ITUA), was founded in 2006. Going on strike at Ford in Vsevolozhsk near Saint-Petersburg in 2007, it quickly created an image of a strong, independent and democratic union, fiercely guarding the rights and interests of its members. ITUA's formation and early struggles marked a distinct departure from the historical understanding of trade unions dating back to Soviet times.

"Many workers still perceive unions as a kind of charity, giving material support in return for a small fee, and they are seen as part of the administration. In the beginning I shared this view," he said. Dmitry's opinion changed in part through workshops organized by unions in Europe and the IMF. "However, we didn't just take the model of unions in Europe as a basis, we created our own vision," says Dmitry.



"We engage in union activism in our free time, at the expense of our private lives. Not every activist can fully commit to union work in such circumstances," says Dmitry Trudovoy, deputy president of the local branch of ITUA at VW in Kaluga, Russia.

Photo: ITUA

Recognizing the central importance of organizing, the ITUA has begun to employ people as dedicated organizers, paid for by the national union. "This has also allowed us to look at other plants in the city, and now we try to support workers' efforts at creating independent, militant unions there," explains Dmitry.

Since February 2011, the IMF in conjunction with the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) is supporting ITUA organizing activities at several auto plants in Saint-Petersburg and the surrounding area targeting the 4,300 to 4,700 workers at the Nissan, General Motors, Nokian Tires, Hyundai and Faurecia plants.



"Union leadership has used education sessions to address workers and hear their experiences. It shows commitment to their issues and has laid the groundwork for organizing. I can see that workers are now actively involved in the union and every member can say what the union is doing," explains NUBEGW union educator Margaret Mwelwa in Zambia.

Photo: NUBEGW



### IMF ON ORGANIZING

Encouraging workers to build independent, democratic and representative national unions that are autonomous from employers, political parties and governments is one of the key goals of the IMF. As in the case of Russia, IMF works with a range of trade union partners to assist unions in organizing and building strong national unions that, in a permanent democratic relationship with workers, are capable of achieving real gains through collective bargaining and having an impact on national public policies.

In 2003 and 2004 the IMF began to suspect that its Zambian affiliate the National Union of Building, Engineering and General Workers (NUBEGW) was not sustainable when reports from the union indicated poor administration including staff not being paid and offices without equipment. While the union reported membership figures of over 10,000, there was no way to verify it. The union was also undemocratic, resembling a fiefdom under the unchallenged authority of a General Secretary in power for many years.

With support from IF Metall and LO TCO, the IMF Regional Office in Africa took up the challenge to improve the development of union democracy at NUBEGW through an education programme initially focused on the basics of trade unionism and building the workers' role in the union.

A core driver was to create a culture of organizing in the union that went beyond recruiting membership to addressing worker issues and representing worker demands. As workers became more active in the union, structures were revived, membership was registered, dues were collected and members began to demand accountability from the union leadership. A new general secretary was elected in 2005, and when he failed to deliver, another in 2007 and today the union is in much better shape.

NUBEGW has also made great strides to better involve women workers in all aspects of the union including organizing, education and in the Executive. "The National Executive Committee is now gender balanced with three women and four men. There has been no tokenism; women have won their places competitively through elections," reports Gabriel Phiri, NUBEGW General Secretary.

Recruiting members is still a challenge. Currently membership is over 8,000 but NUBEGW hopes to get this figure up to 10,000 by the end of 2011. "We have been working hard to make positive gains to build the union through membership. Our efforts have suffered because of the recession that resulted in job losses and membership losses. But if we were not focused on organizing, the loss would have been even greater," explains Gabriel.

Worker education has been successfully used as an opportunity to recruit and organize workers with a focus on women and youth. It has improved the visibility of the union, putting the union in direct contact with workers to hear their issues and build worker confidence in the union. Union educator Margaret Mwelwa explains that organizing "is very important, as it brings workers together making them able to act with one mind. When you organize things become easier. It shows how serious you are when dealing with employers."

## ORGANIZING CONTRACT WORKERS

Education on workers' rights is also a fundamental part of IMF's work with the Indian National Metalworkers' Federation (INMF) and the Steel, Metal and Engineering Workers' Federation of India (SMEFI) aimed at organizing workers in the steel industry. Supported by the LO-TCO and SASK and IMF affiliates IF Metall, Unionen, Metalliliitto and PRO, the project began in 2009 and is running in three of the states where the steel industry is concentrated: Orissa, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Both INMF and SMEFI have agreed to join forces and target specific companies, aiming to organize the whole workforce, from the precarious workers to the white collar workers, to avoid fragmentation and competing for members.

Until now, unionization of workers in the steel sector, as it is with most of the metal industry in India, is largely restricted to permanent workers in current or former public sector enterprises. India has one of the world's largest iron ore reserves and expanding domestic consumption of steel. With a trend of concentration of production in large private companies and the growing presence of transnational companies, most of which have no union, the IMF and unions in India have identified this sector as a key target for organizing. With a target of 20,000 new members by 2012, so far 10,000 workers have been organized through the work of this IMF project.

Sanjay Kumar Singh, President of the INMF and one of the IMF India Steel Organizing Project Coordinators, explains that organizing contract and casual workers in this sector is one of the main goals of the project. "In Chhattisgarh a large number of workers in the steel industry are working under poor working conditions with a massive number of contract and casual labourers. Most of them work for 12 to 14 hours a day and are paid less than minimum wages without any statutory benefits and social security," explains Sanjay.

One of the main challenges of organizing contract workers is the threat to job security and organizing initiatives are severely opposed by management. In most cases, when workers start a union the management immediately sacks them. It is difficult to fight as the workers have no records to prove that they worked at a particular factory. Union organizers also face physical attacks from goons and false cases are filed against them by police. "In the Raipur District, our union organizer's house was attacked by management-paid goons. A police case was

also filed against him, which could lead to six months of imprisonment, after he participated in a workers' protest," said Sanjay.

In most cases organizing at multinational and big steel companies is further complicated by the presence of "in-house" unions that the companies promote and register as an official agent of the workers. Due to the fierce opposition from companies the union not only focuses on educating workers, but is also engaging with local communities. "This strategy helps to create awareness of trade unions and informs the workers about the benefits of joining trade unions," explains Sanjay.

The unions have also had some success convincing the government to adopt policies that help to improve the situation for contract workers. "Since December 2009, we have been insisting that government authorities frame rules to make payments to contract workers through banks. This provides contract workers with an identity and makes the wage payment process transparent and helps workers to get minimum wages," explains Sanjay. As a result of the union's demands, the Government has instructed companies to pay contract workers' wages through banks and to complete the process of opening bank accounts for contract workers by March 31, 2011.

The unions are also using the strength and solidarity of unionized permanent workers, particularly where there is already good union density. "While we take help from permanent workers, we are following the strategy of contract and casual workers leading their unions," Sanjay explains. "We are in the process of registering separate unions in many companies. We also gained wage increases for contract workers in the Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) unit in Bhilai," reports Sanjay.

## VIOLENCE & PERSECUTION

Nowhere is the persecution and violence perpetrated against union leaders and organizers worse than it is in Colombia, which has the highest number of murdered trade unionists in the world. In 2010 alone, 46 trade union leaders were killed.

It is legal to form trade unions, a right established under the country's Constitution. However trade unions are considered to be subversive elements and not social partners. National and transnational companies adopt anti-trade union practices, with some companies employing



"Owing to severe repression from management the process of organizing has been slower, but we are hopeful to make progress," explains Sanjay Kumar Singh, one of the IMF India Steel Organizing Project Coordinators.

Photo: INMF



paramilitaries to kill unionists, and all attempts to form unions with any influence at the national level are repressed. Consequently, less than five per cent of the country's economically active population is a member of a trade union and the working conditions of less than half of this number is regulated by a collective agreement.

Despite the frightening reality, there is no reduction in the number of trade union leaders prepared to respond to this dramatic situation and fight to change the country and defend the interests of workers. But as most unions are company-based, the movement is highly fragmented and lacks the capacity to act at the national or industry level. In this context the IMF's work with its two affiliates in Colombia, the Metalworkers' and Miners' Union (UTRAMMICOL) and the Metalworking Industries Union Federation (FETRAMECOL), is focused on improving union strength and unity within and among both federations as a fundamental basis from which to organize workers.

The building national unions project in Latin America, which is supported by IF Metall and LO TCO, covers the period 2008-2012 and involves affiliates in Chile and Colombia. Marino Vani, IMF Regional Officer, explains that the project "obliges each organization to discuss and formulate joint actions to strengthen trade unions and identify common objectives. We hope this project will help workers learn and understand the need to create united and representative national unions that include workers in precarious and outsourced jobs and in this way increase membership."

Precarious work, both a result of low unionization and a significant barrier to organizing, has been a constant focus for struggle in Colombia. The spread of "employment cooperatives", known as cooperativas de trabajo asociado (CTAs), but which are in fact employment agencies, has led to a deterioration in working conditions and further undermined fundamental workers' rights. CTAs and their impact on rights is one of the issues that both of IMF's affiliates are campaigning on together.

Miguel Hernández, FETRAMECOL Education Officer, coordinates study circles in Bogotá and is a member of the SINDICOLMENA union. He believes that the anti-union policies in operation in Colombia, including the persecution of union leaders, legal restrictions and the use of CTAs, are the main challenges that unions face in Colombia. "These anti-union policies make ordinary members afraid to attend training courses and other workers afraid to join the union," explains Miguel.

Miguel's union has found that some of the more successful tactics are a buddy system, individual action plans and study circles. "The increasing unity between affiliates and the education of trade union leaders who now have a better understanding of the sector through mapping the metalworking industry and developing a global vision and analysis of the sector, is making an impact on our work," he adds.

Mauricio Castro has worked at Diaco-Gerdau for the last 25 years and is president of the National Metalworkers' Union (SINTRAMETAL), a member of the UTRAMMICOL executive committee and an Education Officer of the national centre CUT for the Boyacá department. He is regional coordinator for the project in Boyacá. "We have many problems, starting with the type of employment contracts and outsourcing. Physical persecution is another problem, with more than 3,000 trade union leaders killed since 1986," explains Mauricio.

"Our work requires time and results, we must work responsibly, produce results, solve specific problems and develop a clear understanding that unity is the only way we are going to survive in a world full of inequalities," says Mauricio.

## OFFSETTING THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

Attracting new members and increasing density is not only an issue for unions in developing countries. Everywhere unionization rates have been in decline for decades and the global jobs crisis has in many cases accelerated this decline. Recognizing that the financial crisis could pose a significant threat to membership numbers, the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) decided to go on the offensive and put significant resources and energy into organizing. In 2008 the leadership of AWU agreed on a "low hanging fruit" strategy of focusing on workplaces where the union already had members, workplace delegates and agreements in place and the union could access the workplace.

Daniel Walton, AWU National Campaign and Organizing Co-ordinator explains how most workplaces used to be "closed-shops". Then with the introduction of anti-union labour laws and individual contracts suddenly things changed. "We went from a situation of not speaking to people, to doing everything we could do to protect pay and conditions of existing members, but we were not



"The trade union structure here, which is company-based, makes it difficult to take decisions at the sector level," says Miguel Hernández, FETRAMECOL Education Officer.

Photo: FETRAMECOL



"We have been using education and discussion of issues relevant to unity and the need to organize the unorganized," says Mauricio Castro a regional co-ordinator of the union building project in Colombia.

Photo: Valeska Solís/IMF



looking at the non-members on sites," explained Daniel. "Now at each site we started by mapping out who are members and who are not. Then we updated the conversational skills of organizers and delegates so they know how to ask questions and find out what workers' issues are and how to show that a union can help," he said. "And we focused on workplaces that were due to renew agreements, as this is the time when people are most interested in speaking to a union."

lower costs at non-unionized sites. So to strengthen its bargaining position, benefit existing members and continue to grow the union, AWU's first target is organizing a non-union Rio Tinto smelter in Bell Bay, Tasmania.

As part of its organizing strategy, the AWU reached out to the IMF for support against this global anti-union company and has received letters of solidarity from IMF affiliates around the world who have Rio Tinto workers as members. "We had a meeting in Tasmania recently where we handed out copies of the letters of solidarity from all the unions internationally. Bell Bay is a small site off the mainland of Australia, so it was a big moral-booster to know that people around the world are watching and supporting these workers," said Daniel.

## INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Like at Rio Tinto in Australia, international solidarity is playing an increasingly important role in union organizing around the world. The cross-border movement of capital and dominance of transnational companies in many metalworking sectors has unions reaching out to one another for support when organizing.

In the U.S., the United Auto Workers (UAW) is putting renewed focus on organizing and at the end of March 2011 announced that it had increased its membership by 21,000 in 2010, from 355,191 in 2009 to 376,612 in 2010. UAW is also now specifically targeting "foreign transplants" operating in the auto sector in the U.S., which are almost exclusively located in the Southern "Right to Work" States, none of which are unionized to date. The union has recognized that a significant factor for success will be the international solidarity between UAW and the workers and unions in the countries of when the multinational auto companies are based, including Germany, Japan and Korea. With assistance from IMF, UAW is building closer links to workers and unions in the auto companies they hope to organize in the U.S.

## GET INSPIRED & ORGANIZE

"Growing our unions and increasing the number of members and union density must be the primary goal of every trade union," said Fernando Lopes, IMF Assistant General Secretary, who is responsible for union building work at the IMF. "Our work is guided by the IMF Action Programme and is planned and executed by IMF personnel in the regions and the Head Office with active participation of our affiliates in the field," he said.

"The survival and strength of a union has always depended on organizing and the challenge for the IMF today is to ensure that resources directed towards organizing union members results in stronger unions capable of delivering improvements to the lives of metalworkers and building a better world," said Fernando.



**AWU is now the fastest growing union in Australia. "Having leadership drive through a focus on organizing and change the way we work has been one of the key factors for success," says Daniel Walton, AWU National Campaign and Organizing Co-ordinator.**

Photo: AWU



The results speak for themselves. AWU is now the fastest growing union in Australia with an increase of 22 per cent of member, from 115,000 members in 2008 to 140,000 in 2010. "Success feeds success," says Daniel. "Early on when we started to gain members in an area, the existing members would get stronger and this would encourage others to also organize," he said. Existing members are benefiting from the increased strength of the union nationally and at each workplace. "Members have a greater ability to have a voice about the things they want to see. Every site is different, but having a strong membership on site puts them in a better position to negotiate on all conditions, not only the traditional union issue of pay," said Daniel.

On the back of this success, the AWU launched a new campaign in February 2011 to organize in the aluminium industry. The union identified that although 70 to 80 per cent of the aluminium industry in Australia is unionized, when it came to bargaining it was under pressure from



**Rio Tinto/Alcan's facility in Bell Bay, Tasmania is the first target of AWU's organizing drive aimed at increasing union density in Australia's aluminium industry.**

Photo: AWU





**FEATURE  
SECURE JOBS**



More than 500,000 people participated in the "March for the Alternatives: Jobs, Growth and Justice" in London on March 26, 2011, a protest rally organized by the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in response to the government's plans to introduce severe austerity measures and drastic cuts to public spending in the UK.  
Photo: Jess Hurd/reportdigital.co.uk

# UNIONS FIGHT BACK FOR SECURE JOBS



Interviews / Valeska Solis, Anita Gardner and Aisha Bahadur  
Translation / Chris Whitehouse  
Text/Editing / Carla Coletti and Anita Gardner



## Three trade unions in three countries are defending workers' rights in response to the global jobs crisis, each according to their strengths and national situation.

What began as a crisis of financial markets in 2007 and 2008 rapidly became a global jobs crisis, causing hardship to many working women and men, families and communities. While the global economy is showing signs of recovery, unemployment is still a major problem for many workers and their unions. Globally at the end of 2009, the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that unemployment was at 6.6 per cent, which is an estimated 210 million people, 34 million more people than the year before. The ILO projects that in 2010 the global unemployment rate will be 6.5 per cent.

Since the beginning of the financial crisis trade unions internationally have denounced its negative impact on employment. Precarious jobs were the first to disappear, soon after good jobs were dramatically cut to be replaced by precarious and less protected ones. Governments and international institutions recognized the trade unions' legitimate demand for exit strategies focused on job creation, but only as long as they needed the support of workers for costly recovery plans that benefit the financial sector and bigger companies.

Many trade unions put in place strategies to protect working families from the devastating combined effect of social cuts, rising unemployment, higher food prices and increasing job insecurity. Collective bargaining has been in most cases the fundamental tool, although the negotiating power of organized labour, already weakened through sustained membership decline, has been further diminished by the job losses in this crisis.

This report examines how the crisis unfolded in three economically different countries, Uruguay, United Kingdom and South Africa, and how three unions affiliated to the IMF are defending the rights of workers in the metal sectors as they attempt to respond to government policies, to business attacks on wages and rights, and to increases in unemployment.



## FEATURE SECURE JOBS

### URUGUAY

Uruguay, a small country with a population of approximately 3.4 million, was ruled by a dictatorship in the 1970s, but returned to a democratic form of government in the 1980s. The country endured a major economic, political and social crisis in 2002 when real wages fell steeply and the unemployment rate reached 17 per cent. With the election of President Tabaré Vázquez the Frente Amplio government in 2004, the situation in Uruguay began to change as progressive and robust social and education policies were introduced.

Uruguay was not overly affected by the international crisis. Uruguay is a producer of raw materials, mostly food, and the effect of the crisis on these products was to increase their price and, with an increase in international demand, this has benefited the country. At the same time, Vázquez's government intensified its focus on the internal market and adopted employment policies with increased wages and consequently increased domestic consumption.

Uruguay's response to the crisis was the opposite of what neoliberal orthodoxy proclaims. Precisely by amplifying its social and employment policies in order to increase consumption and social protection it made itself less vulnerable to the international crisis. This was in stark contrast to the traditional recipe recommended by international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, that called for lower labour costs in response to the crisis.

The increase in export prices and demand during the crisis raised tax revenues and enabled the government to pay for its expansionary social policies. However, as Álvaro Padrón, of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung office in Uruguay, argues a conservative government would also have had economic success due to the increased revenue from exports, but would have introduced restrictive domestic economic policies. "We have seen this before. Uruguay grew a lot in the 1990s, but employment policies were negative," explains Padrón.

Instead, Vázquez's government increased pay in the public and private sectors by more than 20 per cent and adopted employment policies that reduced the unemployment rate to five per cent, the lowest in the last 80 years. The government attracted foreign investment by highlighting the skilled nature of the country's workforce rather than low labour costs, introduced policies against informal work

and outsourcing, and promoted collective bargaining. Significantly, the government's policies have also encouraged unionization such that in the last five years the number of union members has increased by 300 per cent and at 38 per cent density has reached the highest rate in Latin America.

Today, Uruguay has a growing, autonomous, independent trade union movement, with a single trade union central. Padrón believes that even with a progressive government strong pressure from the trade union movement was essential. "This government is committed to making progress on issues of interest to the unions. However, nothing would be done if the unions stopped fighting. Remember that the employers also put pressure on the government," says Padrón.

One of the mechanisms by which wages have increased is through collective bargaining. Under the Frente Amplio government, collective bargaining has been extended to all sectors, including domestic work, the police and agriculture. Negotiations take place by economic sector and unions are organized by economic sector, with one union in each sector. The unions have an agenda that goes beyond traditional issues. For example, in the metalworking sector, the union is negotiating with employers and the government about how to attract investment that guarantees increasing the value of production. Their aim is to change the structure of the economy so it is not so dependent on raw materials.

Marcelo Abdala, General Secretary of IMF affiliate the National Metalworkers' Union (UNTMRA), believes the international crisis affected some automotive companies that are highly integrated with the international economy, but that it did not affect other sectors. He argues that collective bargaining, negotiations in sector wage councils and the increased importance of the internal market compensated for deficits in exports produced by the crisis, mitigating the impact of the crisis overall. "For example, the tanning industry, which is linked to the automotive sector, suffered the same consequences as some auto components companies," explains Abdala.

"Our national confederation, PIT-CNT, has given priority to collective bargaining on industrial development issues through the so-called sector production committees, with participation by representatives of capital, labour and the Minister for Industry. These bodies negotiated an extension



A protest of the trade union movement in Uruguay at the height of the crisis demanding job security and increased wages.

Photo: PIT-CNT



Juan Castillo, General Secretary of PIT-CNT.

Photo: PIT-CNT



to social security and unemployment benefit coverage and increased the working class's role in collective bargaining. In this context, and in the wage councils, we have been successful in negotiating agreements," explains Abdala.



**Marcelo Abdala, General Secretary of the National Metalworkers' Union (UNTMRA).**

Photo: UNTMRA

In Uruguay the system of wage councils was reintroduced in March 2005 to set wages for each sector of the economy. From 2005 to 2009 these wages councils worked in close coordination with sector negotiations. The system enabled the country's economic recovery in the mid-2000s to also result in a rise in employment and wage increases. This was achieved without affecting fiscal stability and prices. Uruguay's experience contradicts the received wisdom according to which governments' should first, focus on economic growth, second, address job creation and third, think about increasing wages. "In fact, in Uruguay, increased wages and higher employment appear to have made a substantial contribution to maintaining robust economic growth," says Abdala.

Juan Castillo, General Secretary of PIT-CNT, says that even if the impact of the world crisis on Uruguay was limited many companies temporarily closed or laid off workers, meaning workers had to register for unemployment benefits. The most vulnerable sectors were young people, women, workers who do not have the protection of a collective agreement and other workers in the informal sector.

In this context, PIT-CNT formulated a strategy involving discussions, mobilizations and negotiations that in the end were successful. "We pushed for a tripartite approach in the sectors experiencing the greatest difficulties and we put into practice agreements that had already been negotiated with the government on social security benefits, special and transitional employment laws and increased coverage of unemployment benefit," said Castillo.

"Collective bargaining is crucial for us to achieve our objectives. It is an instrument that is useful not only to improve wages in times of prosperity but also, and this is even more important, to mitigate the most negative effects of the crisis and ensure it is not always the workers who have to pay for the crisis," he argued.

## UNITED KINGDOM

More than 500,000 people participated in the "March for the Alternatives: Jobs, Growth and Justice" in London on March 26, 2011, a protest rally organized by the Trades Union Congress (TUC). This massive mobilization of union members and working people was in response to the government's plans to introduce severe austerity measures and drastic cuts to public spending in the United Kingdom, announced by the Conservative/Liberal Democratic government since it came to power in May 2010.

The cuts are expected to lead to 500,000 public sector job losses and between 600,000 to 700,000 job losses in the private sector over the next four years. These job losses will exacerbate already high rates of unemployment in the UK, which rose as a result of the global financial crisis from 5.2 per cent in 2008 to 7.9 per cent in the last quarter of 2010. IMF affiliate Unite actively supported the rally on March 26 and has launched a major campaign called "Don't Break Britain" in an attempt to mobilize union members and working people against the government's plans.

Tony Burke, Assistant General Secretary for manufacturing of Unite, believes the UK government is running an ideological political programme. "They are taking opportunities to tighten the screws on trade unions and they are making changes to employment legislation that will affect working people," he argues, believing that the UK was deeply affected by the crisis due to an over-reliance on the financial sector in the country's economy.

"We have allowed the British economy to be utterly reliant on the financial services sector. And when that began to collapse thousands of people lost jobs, and the economy got completely out of balance," he said. "Labour (the former government), while it did some excellent things, it didn't rebalance the economy and over relied on the financial services industry to drive the economy and create growth and wealth," explained Burke. "It generated wealth, but Labour should have made sure it was not going to bring the economy down," he said.

Even before the crisis hit, Unite was arguing for growth in manufacturing. "What we would like to see in the UK is very much based around a German model, where the German government helps and assists their manufacturing industry," argues Burke, citing the example of Sheffield Forge Masters, which needed a soft loan to assist with the manufacture of key components for nuclear reactors. "The first thing the Conservatives did was to cancel that



**Unite campaigns against conservative government austerity measures through its "Don't Break Britain" campaign.**

Photo: Jess Hurd  
reportdigital.co.uk

## FEATURE SECURE JOBS

soft loan to Sheffield Forge Masters, putting a considerable number of jobs in jeopardy,” explains Burke, adding, “that wouldn’t have happened in Germany or France.”

While public sector workers will be in the front line for losing jobs and suffering cuts in pay, all workers in the UK will be hit through the loss of services from transport, to childcare, to health care. Workers in the manufacturing industry will also be directly impacted by the cuts. “We are losing jobs in the aerospace industry because of the cancellation of government defence projects. This is having an effect on our members,” reports Burke.

At the height of the crisis, a lot of companies made wholesale changes to working practices. Pay freezes were imposed and people were promised that if they accepted short time working their jobs would be saved. “But the reality was that people were still made redundant,” said Burke. “We did reach agreements with some companies to help them over a very difficult period. But the problem is that some employers took advantage of the situation to drive down working conditions,” he said.

Unite is continuing to work with companies and government agencies like the Manufacturing Skills Alliance to promote employment in the manufacturing industry particularly through apprenticeships, which is extremely important given the high levels of youth unemployment in the UK. As is the case in many countries, the UK has seen women and young people hit hardest by unemployment in this crisis. In the last quarter of 2010, the total youth unemployment was 965,000, the highest since records began in the UK in 1992. “We are arguing that companies should be looking at taking on apprentices in skilled areas and in the manufacturing sector,” said Burke.

Another common global feature of the jobs crisis is the sharp increase in the rising number of people employed precariously or in “atypical” jobs. There were 1,771,000 people in involuntary part-time or temporary work at the end of 2010 in the UK, again the highest number since records began in 1992. Due to weak labour legislation, employers are able to replace people in well paid employment with low paid precarious employment. On this issue, Unite has been at the forefront of arguing for the rapid introduction of the European Union’s Agency and Temporary Workers Directive that aims to provide protection for workers employed in this way. “Unfortunately, the Labour government dragged its feet

for too long and it prepared legislation that the Tories will introduce which is probably among some of the weakest legislation with regard to temporary workers in Europe,” said Burke.

Another impact of the jobs crisis in the UK has been a decline in wages. The most recent TUC Labour Market Report indicates that inflation is running around 5.1 per cent and growth in average weekly earnings is at 2.3 per cent. Some sectors are lower and the only sector where earnings growth comes close to inflation is finance and business (4.4 per cent). Currently the average settlement in manufacturing is between two and 2.5 per cent pay increases.

Of even greater concern is the future of collective bargaining in the UK as in some parts of the manufacturing industry in the UK, where an employers’ federation still exists, they no longer want to have national collective bargaining. “This is happening in the print industry where there is a national collective agreement covering over 20,000 people. The employers have said that they no longer want to have national collective bargaining. That means that pay bargaining is now going to take place at local level. Stronger workplaces will be able to deliver pay increases, but in areas where we are not so strong it is going to be very, very difficult,” warns Burke.

## SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa, the effect of the global crisis also dealt a significant blow to jobs, with 1.1 million jobs lost between 2008 and 2010. This has placed a huge strain on low income households, with many struggling to meet basic needs. South Africa continues to have one of the most unequal societies and high unemployment at around 25 per cent.

“We lost about 62,000 workers,” says Irvin Jim, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (Numsa). “In the rest of the economy we lost one million jobs. In our country where there is no comprehensive social security, where one worker supports five families, the over a million jobs lost in the economy means many families have been plunged into serious social ills of poverty, unemployment and inequalities,” he explains.

The ‘Framework for South Africa’s response to the international economic crisis’, agreed on by ‘social partners’, organized labour, business and government in February 2009, sets out measures to implement interventions under a broad stimulus package with economic and social components. Under the framework IMF affiliate Numsa demanded a moratorium on retrenchments and was successful in supporting companies access to crisis related assistance. The union is also working with the Department for Trade and Industry and the International Trade Administration Commission to investigate import duties in order to protect the local auto, components and equipment industry.

Numsa has been the most successful union in South Africa at gaining access to the training layoff scheme for workers, another initiative under the framework, where workers are directed to training with subsidies for wages for a period, to give companies time to recover and thus prevent retrenchments. Thousands of jobs have been saved through the union’s efforts to secure the scheme



“There is a massive feeling across the UK that the government cuts and austerity measures are going to affect us significantly and that we had nothing to do with creating the situation,” said Tony Burke, Unite Assistant General Secretary.

Photo: John Harris  
reportdigital.co.uk

in workplaces. “We did this in several companies where retrenchments would have taken place and we succeeded to stop retrenchments,” explained Jim.

The key to Numsa’s success in saving jobs during the crisis has been the development of the union’s strategic response to the job loss crisis, with a combined focus on industrial strategy for job creation and retention along with local level training of unionists to respond to the crisis and defend workers. The union has ensured the education, training and development of its shop stewards in order for them to be a strong first line of defence in the fight to save decent jobs in the sector.

Numsa initiated this strategy at its 2009 Jobs Summit and has worked with government and business to ensure measures are in place to defend jobs. Nevertheless, Numsa has called for a shift in macroeconomic policy. “Numsa welcomes the fact that government is now championing a jobs campaign. However we take the view that for the New Growth Path to be able to deliver it would have to be overhauled and unstuck from the “Washington consensus”, neoliberal macroeconomic framework embedded in our country,” said Jim. “In our country we have an abnormal situation where finance capital has been privileged over industrial capital and Numsa has been making a call for a vibrant industrial strategy that is jobs led,” he explained.

“This means shifting the country into a completely new trajectory where South Africa’s manufacturing and industrialization will be a priority. This will mean transformation of our minerals-energy complex to ensure beneficiation and diversification so that we can meaningfully reverse the legacy of colonization where our minerals are still only exported as raw material,” explained Jim. “The process we are championing will lead to job creation in the country,” said Jim.

The union has also successfully used its collective bargaining strength to call for a ban on the use of labour brokers, making significant inroads in this campaign. This tops the union’s most worthy achievements during this time, as it is precarious workers, employed by labour brokers with no job security, that have been most affected by the crisis. “For instance, in the auto industry we secured medical aid for workers who are on fixed term contracts.

Using our collective bargaining strength through a strike action, we banned labour brokers successfully in the auto sector and tyre sector. The motor sector employers committed to phase out labour brokers over a three year period to 35 per cent in the industry,” said Jim.

Not everyone is convinced about the robustness of the South African government’s response to the crisis. In October 2010, the ILO stated that while South Africa was one of the first countries to develop a framework response to the economic crisis, it was one of the worst performers in terms of concrete action. “There are critical issues, that government could have moved with speed on making sure that government departments at all levels procured locally. We could have imposed an export tax on minerals so that we encourage investment in our country. The government could have also cut interest rates more quickly. In these contexts ILO might be correct,” said Jim.

Numsa understands that they are part of a global struggle. “Everywhere you look in the world you see millions of workers who are out of work, suffering high food, energy and oil prices and the world goes on as if they do not exist. This is the flip side to the capitalist world we live in, in which a small tiny minority are filthy rich!” exclaims Jim. “Slowly the masses are beginning to say enough is enough. They are shedding their fear and confronting their situation,” says Jim.

“We saw the student riots in Britain against the ruthless budget cuts of the conservatives and liberals in power there. We saw the riots and strikes in France against similar harsh conditions of the working and poor people. Today we witness the uprising in Tunisia, in Egypt, in Yemen, and sooner than later, perhaps, much closer to home,” argues Jim.

“Global capitalism is failing humanity, burning the earth, polluting our rivers and oceans, and risking blowing all of us into thin air. The fundamental question is how do our working class institutions like the International Metalworkers’ Federation begin to take up campaigns that must be about building an alternative world. For Numsa such an alternative world is socialism, which is not an end in itself, where instead of advancing greed we should advance humanity,” he argues.



**Toyota workers on strike in August and September 2011 as part of the union’s national action in the automotive industry in support of collective bargaining demands that include the phasing out of the use of labour brokers.**

Photo: Numsa



**“Still there are not enough jobs, homes and food to go around, who shall be the target of the anger of the millions without jobs and proper homes?” asks Irvin Jim, Numsa General Secretary.**

Photo: Numsa





## SPECIAL REPORT



Unionists from around the world gathered at the IMF General Motors and Opel Planning Group Meeting in Rüsselsheim, Germany in February 2011.

Text / Valeska Solis

Translation / Chris Whitehouse

# NETWORKS: WORKING TOGETHER INTERNATIONALLY

One of the IMF's goals is to ensure an equal playing field for workers that goes beyond minimum standards. That is why the IMF stresses the importance of creating networks in transnational companies to promote solidarity and cooperation between trade unions representing workers in these companies.



On February 21, 2011, Gerdau dismissed three workers at its new plant in Tocancipá, Colombia. These workers were eager to join the union, Sintrametel. In response, workers at Gerdau plants around the world contacted company directors to demand an end to anti-trade union practices at the Tocancipá plant.

Since 2006, Gerdau workers internationally have written to management, conducted factory gate vigils and organized days of action to defend their rights. The IMF believes that such actions are essential if trade unions are going to be able to develop joint strategies for global action and challenge transnational companies (TNCs) in a context of globalization, technological progress and the growth of companies at the world level.

Whenever workers' rights are violated, whenever a factory is closed and masses of workers are dismissed, whenever workplace accidents occur at a transnational company, the trade union response must be international. To achieve this union representatives in different countries need to continually build their relationship, intensify solidarity and increase the capacity of affiliates to act together in any particular dispute.

Trade union networks can challenge the power of TNCs that use their international structure to escape their employment, social, economic and environmental obligations. One of the IMF's goals is to ensure an equal playing field for workers and that is why it stresses the importance of creating networks in TNCs to promote solidarity and cooperation between trade unions representing workers in these companies and throughout their supply chains.

The networks must be independent trade union bodies. They may be recognized by companies but they must always maintain their independence. They must be transparent and each union must participate in the network. Ideally networks will formulate an action plan setting out their objectives, the duties of the coordinator and how and when they will meet.

## CROSS-BORDER EQUALITY

The fact that the conditions of workers employed by a TNC vary from plant to plant promotes competition between workers and this has been the reason behind the emergence of some trade union networks. Union leaders emphasize the importance of creating union networks linking workers at different plants in order to combat this situation.

Christian Pilichowski, of FTM-CGT, France who is a member of the Caterpillar network, says that the company promotes competition between workers at different plants, "which means we need unions in other countries to exchange information with us directly without going through management. Only the network is in a position to do this."

Siemens workers in India created a national trade union network because of the unequal conditions at the company's various factories, explains Uday Mahale of the All India Siemens Employees' Federation. This network has only been operating



Trade unionists from around the world agreed to strengthen their cooperation and create a trade union network at Caterpillar, the world's largest manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, at a meeting in France in April 2010.

for less than a year and is not recognized by the company. It came about through a joint initiative of the IMF, IG Metall and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) to tackle the differences between plants. "We want to eliminate disparities, improve conditions, promote equality between workers and replace local collective bargaining with national collective bargaining," says Uday.

"A company such as Daimler, with operations in 200 countries, always makes investments in an unequal way and always tries to play off workers in different countries against each other. This is why the goal of the Daimler World Employee Committee is to promote solidarity between workers to stop the company playing workers off against each other," says Valter Sanches, of CNM/CUT, Brazil and a member of the committee. Valter adds that "the company has tried to play us off against each other several times, for example, I remember the strike in South Africa in 2004, there was no production there so the company wanted to export cars from Brazil and Germany to South African markets, but we did not allow this because it would have undermined the strike, and this was a message to the company."

## SOLIDARITY

Networks are sometimes created on the initiative of the IMF and sometimes on the initiative of workers at the plants themselves, in response to a specific event, such as occurred with the Gerdau and Tenaris networks. In 1998, Gerdau bought its first factory in Canada and this gave rise to the initial contacts with Brazilians. Later, unions representing workers at Canada went on strike and the Brazilian workers acted in solidarity with Canadian workers. In this way the network began to gain strength. In 2006, the workers held a first meeting in Brazil before the network was formally created in 2007. The Tenaris network was created after a strike in 2007, when Argentina workers acted in solidarity with Canadian workers who were on strike. Both networks are now World Employee Committees, although in both cases the companies prefer to negotiate locally and do not recognize the world committees.

The Gerdau network, which includes workers in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, the United States, Spain and Peru is seeking company recognition of



Trade unionists from the IMF engaged in coordinating trade union networks within TNCs came together in Brazil in March 2011 to discuss how to strengthen their role in building and strengthening cross-border global solidarity and action.

Photo: Valeska Solis



the Gerdau Workers' World Council and hopes to negotiate an International Framework Agreement and set up a joint world committee to discuss health and safety matters.

The trade union representatives of workers at Tenaris in Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Italy and Romania are united in the struggle to improve conditions at all the company's plants, seek company recognition of the World Committee and negotiate an International Framework Agreement.

### THE COORDINATORS' ROLE

Strengthening the network depends on coordination and its capacity for organization so that its solidarity actions have an impact in all countries where the company operates. Experience within the IMF has shown that a good way to achieve this is when each network appoints a coordinator who should be a full-time official or union representative who is able to encourage an active and regular exchange of information, put together newsletters and prepare joint meetings and actions.

"Without a coordinator, I am not sure how well a network can operate. My experience is that without someone to coordinate the network, the network tends to collapse. This is another lesson we have learned," said Jorge Garcia-Orgales, of the USW and coordinator of the Tenaris and Gerdau networks.

"The most important thing is to keep in contact and look for opportunities," says Jorge, believing that the coordinator's job is to manage the network, including produce reports and distribute them to everyone in the network, coordinate ideas and meetings, organize days of action and decide on logistical issues.

Jorge believes the network's identity is important, and therefore, both World Committees (Tenaris and Gerdau) have a logo, an image they use on letters to governments, on each press release and on each presentation. "The logo is important to identify the network to workers, unions and the company," he says.



Another important aspect of the work coordinated by Jorge is the newsletters that carry information about activities, actions and struggles at each plant in their respective languages, English, Spanish and Portuguese. All workers receive the bulletin and know about the committee.

The Tenaris Workers' World Council decided at its meeting in Bergamo, Italy in September 2009 to take action after hearing a report from Jairo del Rio, the President of SINTRATUCAR a new company level trade union formed in Colombia.

At the September meeting, Rio reported on the difficult situation the workers face with company management at the Cartagena plant and the many death threats received by the SINTRATUCAR union board members.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF SHOP FLOOR PARTICIPATION

"The Gerdau and Tenaris networks try to ensure that everything circulated by email is also printed and included in newsletters for distribution to all union members, so that information on the network's activities reaches the shop floor. At the national level, there is a continuous stream of information about how the network is operating. The networks are based more on the workplace than in the national union, which is a major and important difference," says Jorge.

Masahiko Ichinowatari, of the Japanese union federation IMF-JC, believes that, "creating a network is not difficult, the most important thing is to expand the contact between people. This is the really important thing. If we see ordinary workers have a problem, we tend to help and give the necessary support."

### FROM NETWORKS TO COMMITTEES

In addition to global networks, there are also national and regional networks. These networks should complement each other and also take into account structures such as European Works Councils, World Works Councils and TNC committees on issues such as health and safety.

Valter Sanches, of the CNM/CUT, reports that in Brazil, Daimler does not formally recognize the national network, but the unions have been able to negotiate agreements with the company. He says that the network operates satisfactorily with regard to avoiding plant closures and promoting solidarity with strike action. The Daimler network in Brazil began in 1999, when a factory was started in Juiz de Fora in the state of Minas Gerais. Valter explains that workers in Brazil were not close to the company's global headquarters and therefore their capacity to intervene and influence the direction of the company and obtain information about the company's plans was minimal.

"However, the situation changed when we participated in the World Committee," said Valter. The World Employee Committee, which is recognized by the company and has an agreed constitution, was created in 2000 and has members from Germany, South Africa, Brazil, Canada, Spain, the United States and Japan.



An IMF delegation of Tenaris delegates and union representatives offered solidarity support to the workers and their union, Sintratucar, at the Tenaris facility in Cartagena, Colombia in March 2010.

Photo: Jorge Garcia-Orgales



“The stimulus for the creation of a World Committee was Daimler’s merger with Chrysler, because we urgently needed to discuss the company’s plans in view of the fact that mergers are always followed by plant closures and dismissals,” explained Valter.

Another merger that resulted in the creation of a committee was the merger between Arcelor and Mittal, but in this case, there is a European Works Council rather than a World Committee. Luis Angel Colunga, of Spain’s MCA-UGT, is the coordinator of the ArcelorMittal European Works Council. He explains that the European Council’s role is information and consultation. The company has to provide information on specific issues, production, sales and research, and has the duty to consult with the European Works Council before taking decisions. This does not mean that the company takes the unions’ advice, in the end it does what it feels is appropriate.

Luis says that relations with the company are good: “we have a smooth relationship, we have detailed discussions, but we still disagree on some points.” In conclusion, he adds that the European model of social dialogue is good and should be extended to other areas. “I believe that this European model is valid, where there is permanent and sustainable dialogue,” he said.

## GUIDELINES FOR A NETWORK

One of the IMF’s functions is to act as a facilitator and initiator of networks and its work in this respect resulted in the creation of the Siemens network in India in 2010 and the Caterpillar network, which was set up in 2010. The IMF also facilitated the creation of a regional network of ArcelorMittal workers in Latin America in 2011, where it provided technical assistance to help the network get organized and provided the network with tools to help it develop independently, from the shop floor up to the regional and global bodies.

The IMF will use union networks to build greater capacity for working together in defence of workers’ interests. Trade union networks offer the opportunity to strengthen our influence by working together internationally.

Although each network’s objectives might vary, the IMF believes there are common denominators. Important elements include support for affiliates from unions in the company’s home country and direct communication between national and local union representatives. In some cases the networks enter negotiations with the company to seek recognition of the network, which could even include funding the network, as long as this does

not compromise the independence of the union or the network. Ideally the networks will also include unions in the supply chain, including subcontracted companies, and finally each network should have a coordinator.

The IMF released new guidelines on trade union networks in TNCs at the end of 2010. “It is very important

to create a network, given that the support of local unions is needed. These guidelines are the basics about how networks should be organized. For example, in the case of ArcelorMittal, the company operates in 60 different countries, with different cultures and the guidelines advise how to build a network that includes everybody in these countries and how to be open, transparent and strengthen local unions. This helps unions become stronger,” explains Rob Johnston, IMF Executive Director.

### SEVEN BASIC PRINCIPLES TO ESTABLISH A NETWORK:

**A political mandate from the affiliates involved.**

**Trade unions in the home country of the TNC play a vital role in establishing and operating the network.**

**Networks should be independent union bodies.**

**The network should be transparent and open to all unions that wish to participate, with the agreement of the IMF affiliates.**

**Each union decides who participates in the networks, recognizing the importance of representation and participation from the shop floor.**

**An action plan should be developed to set out the objectives, priorities, structure, ways of communicating and the role of the coordinator.**

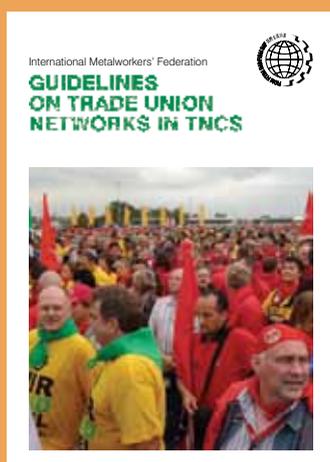
**The goal of the network is to increase the power of the unions vis-à-vis the company at the national, regional and global level.**

## THE GOALS OF A NETWORK

Trade union networks have different objectives: solidarity, equality of rights at all plants in the same TNC, company recognition, organizing in supply chains, agreement on an International Framework Agreement, agreements on health and safety, training and other issues of common interest. Creating, developing and managing union networks is not a simple task but will become an increasingly important activity. Jorge Garcia-Orcales of the Gerdau and Tenaris networks says “if we do not build up our power, the company will not pay any attention to us and having a strong organization will not be enough. We are going to have to think about the kind of activities that attract the attention of the companies more, given that they have not felt the need to sit down with us and negotiate internationally.”

Although most trade union networks set up by IMF affiliates have still not been recognized by the companies in question, the networks have become relevant for employees, unions and companies. “Companies know that unions in different countries have the information and they know they can no longer tell lies and this strengthens workers,” says Christian Pilichowski, of the Caterpillar network. Uday Mahale of the Siemens network in India adds that “trade union networks are the only way of using the globalization of workers to respond to the globalization of the TNCs.”

The use of global trade union networks is very important both for strengthening the world employee committees formed by IMF affiliates and for monitoring International Framework Agreements, because they help to strengthen the trade union movement as a whole.



In December 2010, IMF released new booklet on “Guidelines on Trade Union Networks in TNCs”. It is published in English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German and Russian.

## EMPOWERMENT COMES FROM PARTICIPATION

As the world celebrated the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day on March 8, Peta Thomson and Stephanie Eastcott discuss the importance of unions taking steps to encourage greater women's participation in unions.

Text / **Rob Johnston**

Peta Thomson and Stephanie Eastcott of the Australian Workers' Union are committed and passionate trade unionists. Although neither feels there are barriers to women becoming union representatives, both are the only women union representatives in their workplaces. Both work for Alcoa in Western Australia, Peta at the Wagerup Refinery and Stephanie at the Kwinana Refinery.

Peta, a single mum and blue collar shift worker for 16 years, has been a shop steward for over 10 years, and Stephanie, a delivery driver for 10 years, has been a shop steward for the last 12 months. They explained that their decision to become active in their union came about as a desire to be more involved in company decisions and also to raise issues with management on behalf of fellow workers.

Peta enjoys being a union representative and although she is the only female representative on a site of 700 workers she feels empowered to raise issues on behalf of her members. "In order to encourage more female representatives it's important to build confidence among women workers," she said. "One way to do this is by encouraging women's participation in meetings beyond local issues," she added. As a long standing representative she also feels that it's important not to have to conform to a male stereotype of how she approaches her union work. Peta takes great pride in the fact that she is an elected representative in her own

right saying, "it shows I'm good enough to do the job and shows confidence in me as an AWU representative."

Stephanie begins by describing how her mum once attended a job interview and was turned away because of her gender, which developed in Stephanie a strong sense of social justice. As a fairly new workplace representative she explains that it's important that women don't only deal with women's issues, but also contribute to the everyday work of the union. "Plenty of women are only represented by men, so it's important as women we feel confident to represent men," she said. Her most recent activities have included concluding an enterprise bargaining agreement. Her role as a delivery driver allows her to move round the site and this helped with the communication among the workforce.

Both Peta and Stephanie attended their first AWU National Conference in February 2011 following a decision by the union's national executive to encourage women's participation. The conference gave the women the opportunity to meet successful women leaders, such as the Australian Prime Minister, and to network with other women representatives in the union. Stephanie believes that exposure to female role models is an important way to build confidence and that it's important to hear about women's victories. Peta adds that the conference has given

# PROFILE

## PETA THOMSON & STEPHANIE EASTCOTT

Country / **Australia**

Union / **Australian Workers' Union (AWU)**



Peta Thomson and Stephanie Eastcott attended their first national union conference in February 2011 following a decision by the AWU's national executive to encourage women's participation.



her confidence that if needed the union has got her back. For both Peta and Stephanie it was not easy to attend the conference as management took a long time before agreeing to their participation.

Alcoa has developed an internal women's network and although originally it was only open to management grades it now involves all workers. The network allows the Peta and Stephanie to use their combined voice to improve women's conditions. One benefit of being female union representative's means that the union now has a voice in the

women's network but also that the broader union is aware of the discussions within the network.

In the future both Peta and Stephanie would like to continue to expand their knowledge and participation in the union movement and feel their union is open to this. They are interested in getting involved in issues outside Alcoa. Both feel they have limited knowledge of international work but with the opportunity to participate in the national conference they have confidence to find out more.

