

CROSS-BORDER UNION ALLIANCES AND TRANSNATIONAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING: A CASE STUDY IN A CANADIAN MNC

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ABSTRACT

The last two decades have seen an emergence of new forms of international employee representation within multinational corporations (MNCs). In EU member states, the management at MNCs find themselves having to deal with statutory European Works Councils (EWCs) while at a more global level some studies show a multiplication of solidarity networks and cross-border union alliances put in place by reinvigorated Global Union Federations (GUFs). In order to evaluate the extent to which these cross-border alliances can support the development of transnational collective bargaining within MNCs, this article draws on a single case study conducted recently in a Canadian MNC in the commercial printing industry, namely Quebecor World Inc. In recent years, before the dismantling of this Canadian multinational, union officials sought to coordinate the various unions in this company internationally and to open up a new space for collective bargaining at the transnational level by negotiating an international framework agreement with its management.

Over the last thirty years, neoliberal globalization, coupled with the rise in power of multinational corporations (MNCs), have put union organizations on the defensive. While this observation has been widely documented and can be generalized to all industrialized countries (Glyn 2010; Dunn 2005), several studies have highlighted the particular intensity with which these developments have occurred in the North-American context, where multinational employers have increasingly used coercive comparison, confrontational negotiation strategies, and even anti-union practices (Mac Neil 2010; Peters 2010; Moody 2007). These new realities have thus put union organizations under pressure, forcing them to renew their repertoire of actions and to invest more energetically in the global space (Evans 2010; Frege and Kelly 2004).

Among the different structures and models for action that are currently emerging, solidarity networks and cross-border alliances, whose implementation is often initiated by Global Union Federations (GUFs), stand out as one of the most popular initiatives used today to counterbalance the growing power of MNCs. While the creation of such networks and alliances is not a new phenomenon, recent studies suggest that the current context of globalization is contributing to their resurgence (Bieler and Lindberg 2011; Croucher and Cotton 2009; Bronfenbrenner 2007; Stevis and Boswell 2007; Harrod and O'Brien 2002). These studies, however, leave many unanswered questions due to the limited attention given to date to these networks and alliances, notably the extent to which they can support the development of transnational collective bargaining within MNCs.

In order to explore this issue, this article draws on a single case study conducted between 2005 and 2008 on a Canadian MNC in the commercial printing industry, namely Quebecor World Inc. In recent years, union officials dealing with this Canadian multinational sought to coordinate the various unions in this company internationally and to open up a new space for collective bargaining at the transnational level by negotiating an international framework agreement² (IFA) with its management. This negotiation process, under the leadership of the Union Network International³ (UNI), led to the establishment of a new form of cross-border alliance, known as “UNI Network @ Quebecor World,” and initiated a worldwide campaign for union rights. Ambitious in scope, this campaign entailed the coordination of various solidarity actions through the involvement of unions from more than a dozen countries.

Starting from this context, the analysis conducted in this article is based on empirical data gathered from multiple sources. The core database comprises a series of 40 semi-structured interviews with direct participants in this network. Carried out from 2005 to 2008, these interviews were conducted in approximately ten different countries, in Europe and in North and South America. Participants were selected according to their position within each union and their involvement in the network. More specifically, the data collection strategy used in our study first involved meeting a number of union actors who were affiliated, in particular, with the Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) and with UNI, both recognized as playing a key role in creating and leading this network. These initial contacts with “UNI Network @ Quebecor World” officials opened the way for us to attend meetings organized by this group, which enabled us to meet the union representatives taking part and to observe the dynamics characterizing the internal operations of this network. When necessary, we also interviewed some of these union representatives in their respective countries in order to deepen our understanding of certain dimensions related to the activities carried out by this alliance and these representatives' degree of involvement. These first contacts in the field, moreover, led us to understand that “UNI Network @ Quebecor

World” was actually a disparate collection of union organizations located in various territories. As part of our study, we interviewed, among many others, presidents of local union organizations in South America, national advisors from central labour bodies in Europe and North America, and representatives from a GUF. Despite the diversity of the positions they held, these union officials all shared the role of representing their union organization internationally, reporting on the situation at the company in their respective countries, agreeing on the action strategies to be adopted, and coordinating the mobilization of their members. The interviews began with an exploration of the general events that had taken place and then moved on to a more detailed examination of the process by which an international framework agreement had been negotiated.

While this material constitutes the core of the research data, it was complemented by observation during union meetings and by documentary materials, including those posted on an official web site of the UNI which provided access to information published by different national and local union organizations representing Quebecor World workers. Other sources of information included a large body of documentation made up of many corporate documents, several articles from the print media describing the financial situation of the corporation and the state of its labour relations, and minutes of European Works Council meetings. Additional information was also collected during various visits to plants and meetings with workers.

Our analysis is structured as follows. In the first section, we will set the scene with a brief historical overview of global workers’ representation structures within MNCs and their impact on the development of transnational collective bargaining. Second, we will present the case of the cross-border union alliance that was established within Quebecor World. A description of the processes leading to the creation of this alliance and the poles of strategic actions developed by its members within the framework of a transnational corporate campaign called “Justice @ Quebecor,” will be followed by an analysis of the negotiation process leading to the international framework agreement co-signed in 2007 by this union network and the management at Quebecor World. The conclusion of this article offers an examination of the lessons that can be drawn from the case study and a discussion of future prospects for transnational collective bargaining at the level of MNCs.

DEVELOPING SUPRANATIONAL WORKERS’ REPRESENTATION STRUCTURES WITHIN MNCs

The institutionalization of global workers’ representation structures in MNCs is not a new phenomenon. The first instruments developed by unions within multinationals were put in place during the 1960-70s and took the form of World Works Councils (WWCs), originally established in the automotive sector (Bendiner 1977; Litvak and Maule 1972). In fact, the first WWCs were set up

between June 1966 and November 1968 in five major companies in the automotive sector (namely Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, Volkswagen/Mercedes-Benz and Fiat-Citroën) before spreading to other sectors under the leadership of the GUFs⁴, which encouraged the creation of these Councils in order to coordinate union action and provide for the exchange of information (Gallin 2008).

The mixed results from the experiences of these first WWCs, which did not lead to the breakthroughs expected in terms of transnational collective bargaining, drew attention to the obstacles blocking union cooperation and effective transnational collective bargaining (Windmuller 2000). These obstacles became the subject of academic debate during the 1970s and 1980s. Many studies were carried out, identifying a wide variety of obstacles such as the constant refusal on the part of the management of most MNCs to recognize GUFs as bargaining parties, and the lack of enthusiasm on the part of national union organizations to transfer part of their responsibility to the international level or even grant the players at this level sufficient resources to efficiently carry out the tasks involved (Northrup and Rowan 1979). The differences in collective bargaining structures and practices in the various countries, the divergent views between the unions in developed countries and those in developing countries, and the lack of interest in international solidarity among members of the national unions in industrialized countries were also examples put forward by these authors to explain why international collective bargaining was not highly developed (Bourque 2008).

While these barriers to union cooperation weakened, and in many cases, completely stalled early attempts to build efficient global workers' representation structures within MNCs, the current context of globalization combined with the growing strength of transnational enterprises seems to have revived the desire of the trade union movement to rely on cross-border alliances. In this regard, regional integration processes have, since the early 1990s, created new opportunities for international cooperation among labour unions and contributed to the emergence of new instances of representation. In the Americas, trade agreements have revitalized the concrete need to build new international solidarities for trade unions, as evidenced by the astonishing number of solidarity networks that have emerged, allowing for the implementation of real collaboration between worker's representatives and leading, in several cases, to progress in the defence of social and trade union rights in MNCs (Anner 2007; Armbruster 2005; Kay 2005). Nonetheless, the European Union stands as the most successful model for cross-border union collaboration through its legislated obligation for companies with activities in more than one EU country to bring together employee representatives for the purposes of consultation within a European Works Council (EWC) (Aballéa and Mias 2010; Béthoux 2008). However, while the innovative nature of these EWCs is generally recognized, their potential in terms of supporting the development

of transnational collective bargaining within MNCs is still the subject of intense debate in the literature between so-called 'Euro-pessimists' and 'Euro-optimists.'⁵

Apart from this ongoing debate, some unions have sought to go beyond the regional boundaries of EWCs and really invest in the transnational space by developing new forms of cross-border union alliances. These alliances can be defined as groups of union organizations from different countries that represent workers from the same MNC, with the aim of enforcing their fundamental rights. Under the leadership of some GUFs which have recently made their establishment a strategic priority,⁶ these cross-border alliances are attracting growing interest among organizations seeking to respond to the negative effects of globalization and the increasing power of MNCs (Croucher and Cotton 2009).

Recently, cross-border union alliances have been active on many fronts, notably in the organization of transnational corporate campaigns and the negotiation of IFAs. Our knowledge concerning these alliances and the process by which these IFAs were negotiated, however, remains limited. In this regard, several questions remain, such as the extent to which these alliances allow for the development of new means of action for the union movement and support the development of transnational collective bargaining within MNCs. In this regard, the alliance that took shape within the multinational Quebecor World provides an interesting basis for reflection.

THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS OF AN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT AT QUEBECOR WORLD INC.

Founded in 1965 by Pierre Péladeau, a well-known French Canadian businessman, Quebecor Inc., which began as a small Quebec-based newspaper publisher, became an important Canadian communications company whose activities were grouped around two poles. The media pole, better known under its corporate name, Quebecor Media Inc., included all of the company's activities related to the field of telecommunications, newspaper publishing and cable services. The industrial pole of Quebecor was formed, for its part, by one of the world's largest commercial printing companies, Quebecor World Inc. In 2008, this subsidiary of Quebecor employed approximately 28,000 workers in a ramified network of more than 115 printing and related facilities in 17 countries, spread mainly over three regional spaces, namely North America, Latin America and Europe.

The history of Quebecor World was marked by steady growth which took place through the use, simultaneously, of an aggressive strategy of acquisitions and strategic expansions in various international markets. This growth, however, showed very clear signs of abating as of the early 2000s. The economic slowdown due to the disruption of the publishing market as well as greater-than-expected challenges related to the integration of World Color Press, a large American commercial printing company with which Quebecor World merged in 1999, led

to the gradual weakening of the company's economic situation and competitive positioning.

To find a way out of this precarious situation, Quebecor management adopted a program involving: (a) a strategy of cost reduction and disposing of facilities which were not part of its core business, (b) the establishment of a retooling program involving the purchase of new presses and new higher-performance equipment; and (c) the closing of the less productive plants (UNI 2006). These downsizing and restructuring measures resulted in many job cuts that affected most of the company's installations. As of the early 2000s, more than 15,000 jobs were lost within the company, equivalent to a third of its total workforce.

The deterioration of the company's economic situation and the series of restructuring measures adopted had a major impact on relations between the company's management and its worker representatives around the world, a phenomenon which was particularly acute in North America. In Canada, despite the efforts deployed by the employer to ensure that the investments the company had recently made in its establishments were accompanied by union concessions, collective bargaining took place, for the most part, without any major conflict. One CEP official described the state of labour relations within Quebecor establishments in Canada as follows:

I mean, just because we don't like their strategy and things like that, that's one thing [...] But they're not aggressively anti-union [...] maybe because we're already unionized. [...] It's a question of them being out to pursue their agenda. And they pursue it more negatively and aggressively in Canada than they used to. But nowhere near the negative and aggressive level in the United States. I mean, it's a question of degree. It's not like, you know, everything is rosy here in Canada [...] But we have a manageable relationship (Interview with a Canadian unionist, Ottawa, November 2006).

As shown by the above quote, labour relations in the company's American plants, on the other hand, continued to be marked by a high level of conflict. The process of unionization at some Quebecor plants, initiated in the later years by the Teamsters Graphic Communications Conference (GCC/IBT), led to truly epic battles with the local management at these plants (Tate 2006). The union actors involved in these processes, moreover, reported having paid the price of "aggressive anti-union campaigns, including threats, harassment and intimidation" (UNI 2006: 34). Furthermore, in plants that were already unionized, negotiations surrounding the renewal of collective agreements often led to strikes or lock-outs. This was notably the case in 2005 at the plant in Effingham (Illinois) where the workers faced the closing of their plant after a strike was launched.

THE CREATION OF THE “UNI NETWORK @ QUEBECOR WORLD”

It is within this context of restructuring and strained labour relations that the first contacts between Quebecor World employee representatives took place. From the beginning, union representatives from many countries (such as Canada, the U.S., France and Sweden) as well as the GUF representing workers in the commercial printing sector, (i.e., the UNI) were at the heart of this process. In 2000, recognizing the problems of access to unionization in some Quebecor World facilities, these union organizations, with the help of the sectoral division of UNI, UNI Graphical, held the first international meeting aimed at promoting the development of contacts between Quebecor World trade union representatives throughout the world. These meetings between union representatives, notably from Europe and the Americas, provided an opportunity to formalize the existence of a working group called “UNI Network @ Quebecor World.”⁷

This international meeting allowed union representatives from various countries to exchange information and report on their conflictual relations with the company. They acknowledged, in particular, the widespread difficulty of being recognized as legitimate interlocutors by the management at various local establishments and described the various actions they had taken in this regard. In Latin America, workers’ representatives described various organizing campaigns under which several allegations of anti-union behaviour were addressed to local managers (UNI 2006). In Europe, several union representatives spoke about the lack of cooperation on the part of company management, first, in terms of negotiating the agreement ratified on March 5, 2003 to set up a European Works Council (EWC) in Quebecor World, and then, in terms of participation in this Council. The most notable actions, however, were carried out in the United States, in the context of a large-scale unionization campaign led by the Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU) with the aim of increasing the number of unionized workers in Quebecor World facilities. Launched in 2002, this campaign, organized jointly with the AFL-CIO and based on a strong mobilization of rank-and-file members, targeted approximately ten plants concentrated in parts of the southern United States (Tate 2006).

These problems concerning the recognition of union legitimacy, coupled with concerns on the part of some union representatives about workers’ health and safety in different company facilities, strengthened the desire of these union representatives to consult and meet each other on a more regular basis. To this end, further meetings between members of this network were organized and new goals and targets were set at the international level, including the opening of a new space for negotiation with company officials in order to conclude an IFA. Thus, having begun as an organ for consultation and information exchange between union representatives, the UNI Network decided more ambitiously to

position itself as a legitimate international interlocutor with the management of this Canadian multinational.

THE OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS AND THE LAUNCH OF THE “JUSTICE @ QUEBECOR” CAMPAIGN

Having agreed on the objective to negotiate an IFA, members of the UNI Network soon tried to contact the company's management starting in early 2003. The multiple letters sent by the network, and co-signed by UNI and various national union representatives, however, remained unanswered. Faced with this refusal to engage in dialogue, the UNI Network sought to increase pressure on Quebecor management by organizing a global mobilization campaign:

We approached the company about starting a dialogue on negotiating a global agreement on labour standards. We sent a letter to the company signed by UNI and, I think, 23 leaders of national unions around the world. We sent that letter asking them to engage in dialogue, but they didn't answer. We sent it again, and they still didn't answer. So we decided we needed to organize a campaign (Interview with a Canadian unionist, Ottawa, November 2006).

2003 was a pivotal year in the evolution of the cross-border union alliance at Quebecor World and for the GCIU campaign in the United States. A large gathering of UNI Network members was held from December 5-10, 2003 in Memphis, Tennessee. As part of this Global Quebecor Solidarity Conference, more than 120 union delegates and workers from 14 different countries came together and made the decision to increase pressure on the company worldwide and to officially launch the “Justice @ Quebecor” campaign.

Many strategies and means of action were established in the framework of this campaign. For example, various solidarity actions were organized, such as the series of “global solidarity days” that followed the conference in Memphis, during which workers at Quebecor plants all over the world wore “Justice @ Quebecor” stickers and T-shirts, signed a petition supporting global labour rights and, in some cases, staged rallies at their own plants. A public awareness campaign was also organized during which union representatives from Quebecor as well as workers from the company's unorganized plants attended various shareholder meetings forcing the Chairman of the Board, former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, to spend much of these meetings dealing with workers' rights. Pressure was also put on Quebecor World customers in order to raise awareness among them of the UNI Network's demands. Knowing that Quebecor printed catalogues and flyers for a number of major retailers, GCIU members sent leaflets to many of these retailers, urging them to demand that Quebecor respect the right of workers to organize.

Trade unions in Europe also played a key role in the development of this pole of strategic action by targeting companies in their respective countries that were Quebecor World customers and had signed an IFA, with the aim of making the most of these agreements. Indeed, while IFAs primarily concern the union organizations and MNCs that have signed them, some of these agreements notably include more or less binding clauses extending their normative content to subcontractors and suppliers.⁸ Steps were taken by Spanish and Swedish trade unions, respectively, to put pressure on Telefónica and IKEA, both Quebecor World customers, to honour the IFAs they had signed by encouraging the management at Quebecor to respect the fundamental rights of its workers. In this regard, as pointed out in the following quote by a Swedish unionist, the contacts established with IKEA were especially fruitful because of the importance of the contract held by Quebecor World to print IKEA catalogues:

I called IKEA and I told them that we were preparing an article for one of the biggest newspapers in Sweden and that we knew that IKEA had a good reputation, that they had a code of conduct and some policies regarding sub-contractors. They had an international framework agreement with wood workers. So I told IKEA that they were not applying these mechanisms correctly because of Quebecor. In response, they asked me “can you hold this for a week or so?” The management at IKEA spoke with the management at Quebecor. Quebecor and their headquarters in Canada were really upset about it, really upset. You know, the contract with IKEA is worth millions and millions of dollars (Interview with a Swedish unionist, Brighton, November 2006).

European trade union representatives at Quebecor World also played a crucial role in mobilizing the European institutional structures promoting the establishment of social dialogue within MNCs to support UNI Network demands for a global labour standards agreement. Despite the problems associated with its operation, union representatives succeeded in including a discussion on IFAs in the agenda of an EWC meeting.

Thus, at this conference in Memphis, two campaigns which ended up mutually reinforcing one another came together. That is, the campaign concerning the unionization of new Quebecor World plants in the United States, and which, carried out at the global level, sought to conclude an agreement with the company on minimum working conditions. As stated by a union official:

We kind of married this global agreement thing with the corporate campaigning stuff that the Americans were doing. And we kind of brought those two concepts together at the global level. And I think that was a gutsy move... in a sense, I think, it happened out of necessity. Because the only other option was to walk away, which was not a good option (Interview with a Canadian unionist, Ottawa, November 2006).

NEGOTIATION AND RATIFICATION OF AN INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

The new means of action put forward by the union representatives and workers at Quebecor World soon began to have an impact on the IFA negotiation process. Company officials, almost two years after the first contacts were made, finally agreed to establish an initial dialogue with UNI Network representatives:

So they started speaking to us at that point. I mean, at that point, we went to Montreal to speak to the Vice President of Human Resources. [...] I mean, this VP was very suspicious and didn't have any idea who we were. So there was a lot of explaining to do (Interview with a UNI delegate, Nyon, April 2006).

These preliminary talks led to a series of meetings and, rapidly, to a first tacit agreement between the parties. Efforts by trade union members in the UNI Network were rewarded when Quebecor officials agreed, in June 2005, to sign a protocol on international labour rights. To this end, UNI was informed by company management that the protocol, on which a tacit agreement had been reached, would be submitted to the company's Board of Directors in August in order to formalize ratification (UNI 2006). However, what should have been a mere formality led instead to a major turnabout on the part of company management and became a point of contention in the negotiation process:

So we had an agreement. And it had been worked out, down to the last comma. It was supposed to go to the board on August 4, 2005. I mean they told us that it was just a formality [...] In the end, I don't know whether it went to the board or not. We kept trying to get in touch with them. And they just didn't reply. This wall of silence just came up [...] (Interview with a UNI delegate, Nyon, April 2006).

Instead of submitting the agreement to its Board of Directors, Quebecor officials changed their strategy and asked for further changes to the agreement which, according to union representatives, would "deny the principles of the initial Declaration" (UNI 2006). Given the impasse, members of the UNI Network indicated their surprise in a letter to Pierre Karl Péladeau, CEO of Quebecor World and son of the company founder, urging him to reconsider the company's position and ratify the agreement previously reached. After several months, company officials finally proposed a new agreement which UNI Network leaders immediately judged to be unacceptable. The main point of contention concerned the company's demand to integrate into the agreement a paragraph stressing its non-legally binding nature.

During the month of May 2006, some changes took place within the company. Pierre Karl Péladeau, at the head of Quebecor World, was replaced by Wes Lucas, formerly with the U.S. company Sun Chemical. According to some union representatives, this change brought a breath of renewal to the ongoing

negotiations. From this change, a more traditional process of negotiation between the parties emerged. The company manifested its desire to sign an IFA, using the text of the original 2005 agreement as a working basis. Several points of negotiation were added and discussed. Union negotiators sought, for example, to introduce the concept of “neutrality” into the agreement to force the company not just to “respect” basic worker and union rights but to commit to remaining neutral and not interfering in or opposing its employees’ efforts to unionize:

One of the main issues was around the question of the right to organize and enforcement and what we wanted was the word “neutrality” included and we wanted a meeting on demand (Interview with a Canadian unionist, Ottawa, July 2007).

After several months of negotiation and consultations, talks between Quebecor officials and the UNI Network delegation eventually led to an agreement to respect and promote international labour rights in the company’s operations, subsidiaries and suppliers, as laid out in the “Joint Statement on the Respect and Promotion of International Labour Standards.”⁹ This IFA, ratified on May 4, 2007 in Barcelona, demonstrated the company’s commitment to respect basic labour rights, as enshrined in International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions.

CONCLUSION

APPRAISING THE SUCCESS OF THE “UNI NETWORK @ QUEBECOR WORLD”

The ratification of the IFA at Quebecor was the fruit of a long negotiation process that evolved irregularly but which stands out in terms of the strong international union mobilization involved. The main union representatives who participated in the negotiation of this agreement were keen to emphasize the importance of having relied on a cross-border alliance to establish a balance of power which proved to be indispensable to the conclusion of this negotiation process:

We’ve had other agreements where we’ve gone to the company, and the president would say “Fine, nice idea, write it down and I’ll sign it” [...] but nobody else was involved. So it doesn’t move anywhere after that. Whereas, when it’s combined with this kind of campaign, with the mobilization of rank-and-file people, it means that once the agreement is in place, they are ready to enforce it. And that’s why this Quebecor thing has been one of the most interesting (Interview with an UNI delegate, Nyon, April 2006).

The importance of this agreement should be evaluated in light of the fact that it is only the second IFA to have been signed by a company with its headquarters

in North America, the first having been concluded in 2001 between the Uniting Food, Farm and Hotel Workers World-Wide (IUF) and the management of Chiquita, one of the largest producers of bananas worldwide whose headquarters is located in Cincinnati, U.S.A. (Riisgaard 2005). In fact, out of the sixty IFAs in existence, only seven have been signed by non-EU MNCs (Papadakis 2008). This fact explains why IFAs are sometimes viewed as a European initiative to foster respect for fundamental labour rights and demonstrates the importance of the agreement signed by this Canadian multinational.

In addition to the signing of the IFA, the actions carried out by the trade unions in the context of these campaigns also led to other forms of progress for the workers of this MNC. In the United States, such actions led Quebecor World union representatives to conclude a “neutrality” agreement¹⁰ on May 5, 2005, co-signed by the management of Quebecor World and the GCC/IBT¹¹ providing for a new unionization procedure which was more favourable to unions than that set out in the U.S. regulatory framework. It did not take long, moreover, for the effects of this agreement to be felt. A few months after it was signed, workers at Quebecor plants in Fernley, Nevada and Versailles, Kentucky voted in favour of joining the GCC/IBT, thus bringing to fruition unionization efforts that had been initiated several years earlier. In South America, international solidarity actions implemented as part of UNI Network activities also played a crucial role in the unionization of some Quebecor plants, such as in Recife, Brazil, but also in Santiago, Chile and, more recently, in Lima, Peru. An AFL-CIO representative praised the concrete results of these UNI Network activities as follows:

To me, one of the exciting things about this campaign was that it produced real results in the US. There are workers today in Kentucky, who have a union that didn't before because of this campaign. And there are workers today in Chile, and Brazil, and Peru who didn't before. So it wasn't just, you know, can workers over here help Americans? It was really: how do we come together to help everyone? And there were real results in several countries as a result of this (Interview with an American unionist, Washington, May 2007).

Thus, the case of the UNI Network shows the potential of new cross-border union alliances in terms of supporting the development of transnational collective bargaining. By creating a space for cooperation between trade unions representing workers from the same MNC, these alliances could facilitate the establishment of common objectives among unions and the building of new transnational bargaining strategies. In a context marked by the absence of any legal framework for transnational collective bargaining at the company level, union organizations must continue to build stronger transnational networks based on new international solidarities if they wish to develop an efficient

countervailing power within MNCs and address processes of transnational collective bargaining without being disadvantaged.

NOTES

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- ² IFAs can be defined as agreements, usually concluded between an MNC and a GUF, on certain principles which, “while they do not constitute collective bargaining agreements in the same sense as agreements reached at the national and local levels, provide a rights framework to encourage recognition and bargaining to take place at those levels” (ICFTU 2004:22). The first examples of such framework agreements emerged in the late 1980s, but their numbers only began to increase significantly starting in 2000. Today, there are approximately 62 IFAs in existence, covering approximately 5.3 million workers, most of them concluded by companies with a seat within the EU (Papadakis 2008).
- ³ UNI is the global union for skills and services, representing more than 900 unions in 150 countries with 15 million affiliated members.
- ⁴ Formerly known as International Trade Secretariats (ITSs).
- ⁵ Certainly, for those who have been described as ‘Euro-pessimists’, this potential is bleak. In this regard, different studies have shown that EWCs, in some cases, have facilitated rather than impeded management-led restructuring and have generated “consent for downsizing” without its being connected “to an extension of collective bargaining” (Greer and Hauptmeier 2008:78-9). Nonetheless, in recent years, another, much more optimistic scenario has emerged, proposing that EWCs are not only a tool for communication between MNC officials and European employee representatives but can also be seen as a way to promote transnational collective bargaining. The empirical studies supporting this argument tend to show that a number of EWCs have, for example, been able to help ensure that employment and social concerns are taken into account in restructuring processes. As was pointed out in a recent report from the *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions*, “this often occurs in an informal and hard-to-measure way, and as a process, but there are a small number of known cases where management and the EWC have concluded some type of written agreement essentially on restructuring matters”⁵ (Eurofound 2008:11).
- ⁶ For example, it should be pointed out that the IMF has revived some of its WWCs and that the Union Network International (UNI) has, for its part, created a number of international union networks at the MNC level.
- ⁷ Hereafter: “UNI Network.”
- ⁸ The degree to which they are binding varies because global union federations did not develop a common approach in this regard. In the case of the IFAs signed by Telefónica and IKEA, these agreements limit the obligation of the multinational company to “informing or encouraging subcontractors and suppliers to respect the principles set out in the agreement” (Bourque 2005:13).

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- ⁹ In this IFA, the management at Quebecor World agreed not to use forced labour or child labour, to prohibit all forms of employment discrimination and to ensure that all of its employees would have equal opportunity. The company also agreed to respect freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining and to provide its workers with a safe and secure working environment. To this end, the agreement included explicit references to some fundamental ILO conventions, namely: (1) the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (Conventions 87 and 98); (2) the exclusion of all forms of forced or compulsory labour (Convention 105); (3) the effective abolition of child labour (Conventions 138 and 182); (4) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation (Conventions 100 and 111). The content of the agreement can be found at the following link:
[http://www.uniglobalunion.org/apps/iPortal.nsf/3100172b0315a124c125717d005dd9bb/b1c66c92bf1d9f86c12575550057c41c/\\$FILE/UNI-Quebecor-en.pdf](http://www.uniglobalunion.org/apps/iPortal.nsf/3100172b0315a124c125717d005dd9bb/b1c66c92bf1d9f86c12575550057c41c/$FILE/UNI-Quebecor-en.pdf)
- ¹⁰ This 24-page protocol stipulates, in particular, that Quebecor employees can vote in favour of, or against union representation by means of a supervised secret-ballot vote. The protocol thus provides for an accelerated secret-ballot election when requested by a union representing at least 30% of employees in the prospective bargaining unit in any non-unionized facility. This election must take place within 21 days of the request and be organized by a neutral arbitrator designated by the parties rather than by the U.S. Labor Relations Board in order to avoid excessive delays.
- ¹¹ The Graphic Communications International Union (GCIU) represented all workers at Quebecor World plants in Canada and the United States until 2005. That year, for strategic reasons, the GCIU merged with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters in the United States, thus forming the Teamsters Graphic Communications Conference (GCC/IBT). In Canada, however, the majority of local unions in the GCIU rejected the merger with the Teamsters, voting instead in favour of a merger with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP).

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