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Claire Ceruti [Ed.]

Labour Organising under Authoritarian Regimes

Nomos

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Edited by Prof. Dr. Christoph Scherrer

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Coverpicture: The prison in Grodno, Belarus, completely surrounded by thousands of peaceful protesters on 16 August, 2020 to protest the arrest of a trade unionist who had participated in a peaceful rally.

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Section 7. Specific Forms of Solidarity

Claire Ceruti

Chapter 1. Introduction

As the 21st century hurtles towards any number of social cliffs and crevasses, driven by sticky economic crisis, deepening inequality, pandemics and fossil fuels, those same motors have made authoritarianism one of the defining problems of the age, revving up the engines of right-wing social movements and states wrestling for control as they pass the pain downwards. This volume is concerned, in particular, with authoritarianism's inevitable attempts to target or co-opt labour and with how labour responds.

The chapters collected here emerged from and expanded a special series by Global Labour University (GLU) alumni and others, some of which were initially published, in shorter forms, on the *Global Labour Column* in preparation for the GLU conference in 2022.

There are three important gaps in this volume. One is any discussion of labour in revolutionary and counter-revolutionary situations such as Egypt and Sudan. Second is the question of organizing and its impossibility in low or high grade war zones, ranging from Ethiopia to Ukraine. The third is analyzing the battle with creeping authoritarianism in formally liberal democracies such as the USA. It is hoped that this volume may stimulate further contributions from such areas.

Neither is the volume globally comprehensive: rather it perches in specific countries and regional clusters, which happen to touch each of the cardinal points of the compass: eSwatini and Zimbabwe, Philippines and Myanmar, Hong Kong and China, Russia and Belarus, Turkey, and Brazil. This is partly because it has emerged from organic links amongst labour activists associated with the GLU.

None of this diminishes its importance and usefulness to labour everywhere. It not only provides history and background to understand authoritarianism in the specific countries covered, but also begins to theorise authoritarianism and resistance to it, as well as laying out specific ideas for international solidarity and some of the subtle debates emerging from that imperative. As such, it is a handbook for the present and the recent future for those of us struggling under existing authoritarian regimes and those of us in the so-called Free World.

Section one offers a number of conceptual lenses for analyzing authoritarianism and resistance to it. In chapter one, Verna Viajar considers populist authoritarianism in the Philippines during the pandemic through

Gramsci's concept of hegemonic crisis to cast light on the 'new forms of authoritarianism', helpful not only for the Philippines but also to understand Trump, Bolsanaro and the like. Jana Silverman's chapter on Brazil lays out the political economy of how Bolsanaro displaced the Workers' Party. And Christopher Siu Tat Mung borrows the concept of anti-politics to frame the forcible dissolution of trade unions in Hong Kong in the face of the National Security Law.

In section two, Fundizwi Sikhondze describes the tribulations of trying to do research during a crack-down in eSwatini. Recognising those challenges is important for potential international allies who may wish for 'proper research' to back up their offers of solidarity; this chapter drives home that we cannot always expect formalism when deciding to support those organising in authoritarian situations.

Section three shows the convergence of economic inequality and crisis with politics, pushing labour into politics, with varied potentialities and pitfalls in Moreblessing Nyambara's history of unions after colonialism in Zimbabwe, while Başak Kocadost lays out the need for 'a political approach that connects with social movements, organizes together in these struggles, and is fed by these struggles' without understanding politics only in electoral terms.

Section four continues a theme introduced in Chapter 4, where labour laws are used to repress rather than protect workers. Fundizwi Sikhondze returns to tell us about the use of the Industrial Courts to suppress a public workers strike eSwatini, while Svetlana Kolganova shows the restrictive reality under formal freedom to unionise in Russia (before it invade Ukraine).

Section five continues the theme of organising labour without unions. Moreblessing Nyambara outlines how deindustrialisation in Zimbabwe, marked by a burgeoning informal sector, helped to undermine labour resistance. Kaye Liang and Elaine Sio-ieng Hui look at alternatives to unions where legal unions are coopted by the state in China, and Yuri Ravavoi discusses how unionists in exile can continue to organise.

Section six considers another defining feature of our age: the treatment of refugees. Can Kaya shows how the EU deal with Turkey about refugees makes that country 'not a part of the EU but its border', with the EU willing to fund an authoritarian government in the interests of border security, which thus 'creates a flaw that authoritarian regimes can exploit' to 'legitimate a labour hell where millions of people make less than the minimum wage' and splits the camp of labour.

Finally, section seven turns to the all-important question of practical solidarity, sandwiched in a discussion about sanctions. Khaing Zar Aung

and Cecilia Brighi open the section to explain why people in Myanmar are calling for more sanctions against the military regime there. Lizaveta Merliak writes about the tools a union used to respond to arrests in Belarus, including the strengths and challenges of online campaigns. Ramon Certeza, Melisa Serrano and Verna Viajar return to the Philippines to describe the background to global and national campaigns against the murder of activists and repression of trade unions there. Finally, Frank Hoffer concludes the section and the book by arguing for the crucial need for international solidarity, but problematizes a self-interested solidarity only with the like-minded, and contends that sanctions, as a knee-jerk response, are not often appropriate or effective. He considers alternatives such as using trade policy to reward governments respecting human rights, and a targeted brain drain from repressive regimes.

This volume is a start, not an end, to the question of how to resist authoritarianism. We hope it will spark further discussion about the nature of authoritarianism, more sharing of what worked and what didn't in specific situations, and above all, more solidarity, within and across borders.

Section 1. Theorising Authoritarianism

Verna Dinah Q. Viajar

Chapter 2. Populist-authoritarianism in the Philippines: contentions, contradictions and hegemonic crisis[1]

The Philippines continues to battle rising Covid-19 infections despite pronouncements from the government that everything is under control (CNN 2021). However, the numbers say otherwise. Globally, the Philippines ranked 20th among the countries with the highest number of Covid-19 cases by February 2022 (Stastista 2022) and 21st for the highest number of Covid-19 deaths (CNN 2021). Among the ten countries making up the Southeast Asia region, the Philippines (3.68 million cases and 54 930 Covid-19 deaths) was second only to Indonesia (4.7 million cases and 145 000 deaths) by February 2022, according to the Johns Hopkins University database. To ease the pressure on the health care system, and reminiscent of the 2020 lockdowns, restrictions on transport, business operations, public services and movement of people across borders are once again being enforced through a variety or gradations of 'community quarantines.' The lockdowns meant job losses for the millions of workers and starvation for the informal or hourly-paid precarious workers in the Philippines. The pandemic has exposed the unequal impact of restrictions for the poor and the rich (Kundnani 2020). The harsh enforcements of quarantine restrictions also exposed how some states around the world are exploiting the need for lockdowns and quarantines 'to intensify patterns of violence that are already normalized in policing' (Kundnani 2020).

Covid response: A tragedy of errors

More than one year ago, on May 2020, the *Nikkei Asian Review* reported that the Philippines has the 'strictest lockdown in Asia, but ineffective vs. Covid-19' (Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas 2020). At that time, the Duterte government had 'brought down public mobility by 85% in transit stations; by 79% of retail and recreation; and by 71% in workplaces' (Sangguniang

1 This article is based on a web article submitted in May 2021 for the Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung Manila Office.

Laiko ng Pilipinas 2020). However, the report further said that the harsh lockdowns have not been effective in stopping the contagion but instead used to consolidate Duterte's authoritarian rule. The 'lockdowns' were heavily criticized for harsh penalties and arrests of quarantine violators, such that there were more people apprehended for violating community quarantines than tested for coronavirus. In April 2020, more than 120 000 people were apprehended for violation of community quarantines by the police and the military, but only 70 000 were tested for coronavirus (Cana 2020). The United Nations, on 29 April 2020, rebuked the Philippines for its 'highly militarized response' to lockdown violators (Ornedo 2020). The strict enforcement and harsh penalties were encouraged by Duterte himself. In one of his late-night press statements, Duterte warned that anyone caught violating the restrictions would be shot (FP 2020). After a month of strict lockdown, there were more people suffering from being arrested for quarantine violations than from coronavirus infections (Viajar 2020).

Duterte's populist-authoritarian leadership: contentions and contradictions

After more than 200 days of lockdown, the year 2020 closed with an economic flatline and the worst contraction among all the countries in Southeast Asia. The Philippine economy contracted by 9.5% due to pandemic restrictions in 2020 (Lafargo 2021), the worst since World War II, and became the worst performer compared to the ten other economies in Southeast Asia (Business World, 2020). The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) also reported that close to 10 million Filipino workers lost their jobs after one year into the pandemic (Cordero 2021). However, in the midst of the pandemic, Duterte's trust ratings rose to 91% according to a survey by Pulse Asia, a private polling firm that conducted the survey on September 2020 (CNN 2020).

As the pandemic shows, Duterte's authoritarian leadership is expressed through and thoroughly in collusion with the military and the police, which possess the legitimate use of state violence, to enforce the harsh Covid restrictions, repress dissent and critics and suspend civil and political rights. Duterte's authoritarian attributes are expressed through two aspects: (a) the narrowing of freedoms and democratic spaces such as civil, political and human rights, of communities and social movements; and (b) the demobilization of people's participation in determining the future of their communities. The narrowing of freedoms such as the freedom to dissent and to express political views under Duterte contributes to the death of

pluralism as we know it. A recent survey by the Social Weather Station (SWS), released on March 2021, found that '65% of Filipinos perceive it is dangerous to publish anything critical to the administration' (Mercado, 2021).

A Gramscian perspective on Duterte's authoritarian and fascist tendencies

Duterte came into the 2016 presidential elections as a dark horse propelled by popular discontent over the ineffective liberal-democratic institutions. His supporters mainly come from the new middle class, those that benefited from recent economic growth and from working abroad, seeking quick solutions to everyday issues such as crime and horrendous traffic, frustrations over the dominance of the 'politically-correct' or intellectual crowd and persistent socio-economic inequalities. Duterte swept the electoral stage with the slogan 'change is coming'. In his campaigns, he promised to single-handedly solve all problems (crime, corruption, drugs, and so on) in just a few months in office. More than 16 million Filipinos believed his rhetoric, entertained by his self-styled bravado and charismatic language. However, five years into office, the persistent problems such as corruption, drugs, crime and traffic that Duterte promised to eradicate remained and even intensified.

To understand Duterte's populist yet authoritarian leadership, Antonio Gramsci's discussion of fascism and hegemony may be instructive. Gramsci's use of hegemony refers to leadership or dominance, and the power of ideas, values, and beliefs in a particular historical moment over a particular political-economic context: 'political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class' (Bates 1975). This article situates Duterte's populist authoritarian leadership during a time of hegemonic crisis in Gramscian terms.

A hegemonic crisis happens when the ruling class has failed to completely dominate or used force to dominate (war), until such time that a broad mass puts forward demands and seizes a particular political moment (Adamson 1980). In such a hegemonic crisis, the political field becomes open and 'a violent solution led by "charismatic men of destiny"' may provide the alternative. Without any strong challenge from other social forces, the moderates or the conservative elite, Gramsci likened the change towards fascism as 'Caesarism' which 'refers to a political intervention by some previously dormant or even previously unknown political force capable of

asserting domination and thus of restoring a static equilibrium during a hegemonic crisis' (Adamson 1980: 628). In this political moment, according to Gramsci, the fascist take-over may emerge through 'the sudden creation of a single heroic figure, or it may be the gradual and institutionalized outcome of a coalition government' (Adamson 1980: 628).

The peculiarity in the emergence of charismatic and populist leaders such as Duterte in the Philippines, Trump in the USA or Bolsonaro of Brazil, fuels many debates in characterizing the new forms of authoritarianism and fascism. Legitimized via electoral contest and buoyed by popular support, Duterte's populist-authoritarian leadership with fascist tendencies has been coined 'Dutertism' by political analysts in the Philippines. Insights from Gramsci's discussion of the Ceasarism/Bonapartism model to explain the rise of 'charismatic leaders' places the emphasis more on transformations in society and reconfiguration of social forces, or the 'breaking up and the rebuilding of social blocs' (Antonini 2021: 105). Rather than focusing on the inevitability of the rise of populist and charismatic leaders in a moment of hegemonic crisis, Gramsci argues that, due to the weakness of the dominant class, 'having exhausted its "propulsive" force, puts itself under the protection of a leader in order to remain in power and to defer (at least temporarily) its defeat' (Antonini 2021: 109).

Conclusion

Duterte's brash brand of leadership contributes to the current polarization of the country's political and civil societies. Culturally, Duterte upended the long-held Filipino values and beliefs in solidarity, community and respect. Duterte has also thwarted liberal policies and norms regarding human rights and women's empowerment that Filipinos have come to live with in the last 40 years. Family ties and friendships have become strained over Duterte's polarizing, hateful stance against his critics, and brutal and militarized policies, such as the killings of drug addicts and communists, as well as unconstitutional restrictions on human rights and other freedoms. Duterte's mode of governance and policy responses during the Covid-19 pandemic exposed his authoritarian leadership with fascist tendencies. These were expressed through the narrowing of freedoms and democratic spaces for peoples' civil, political and human rights and the demobilization of peoples' participation in determining the future of their communities. Likewise, more than one year into our pandemic lives, we have learned that the virus does not discriminate on the basis of wealth, power and material possessions; nevertheless, whilst everyone is in the same

storm, not everyone is on the same boat. Some boats have more social protection than others.

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Jana Silverman

Chapter 3. The political economy of labour relations regimes under 21st century neo-authoritarian governments – a study of Brazil

Throughout the years, Brazilian workers and their union organizations have faced innumerable challenges, including the truncated transition in the 19th century from the slave-labour based system of primitive accumulation to late-developing modern capitalism which deliberately excluded the overwhelming majority of recently emancipated Afro-Brazilians from the formal sector labour market, the establishment of a corporativist labour relations framework in the 1930s which subordinated labour militancy to the interests of the state, and the bloody 1964-1985 military dictatorship which was directly responsible for the extrajudicial assassinations of over 400 union activists (CUT Brasil, 2015). Despite the political advances registered since the ratification of the 1988 constitution, and especially under the labour-friendly Workers Party (PT) administrations, the Brazilian labour movement is once again at a crossroads, enduring physical repression, political delegitimization, and institutional decay under the neo-authoritarian Bolsonaro administration. As Brazilians head to the polls in October 2022 to choose between Bolsonaro's re-election or the return of centre-left former President Luiz Inacio 'Lula' da Silva, the results will literally be life or death for a union movement struggling under a situation marked by democratic decline, economic malaise, and the increasing precarization of work. This article will address the principal obstacles to full human and labour-rights compliance that Brazilian workers are presently facing, as well as discuss the role of international mechanisms and transnational solidarity to remedy these grave and systematic rights violations.

How Bolsonaro displaced the Workers' Party

In order to understand the Brazilian labour movement's current crisis, it is important to briefly analyse how the neo-fascist Bolsonaro administration rose to power, only a handful of years after the widely touted successes of the PT governments in promoting economic growth with social inclusion during the first decade and a half of the 21st century. In the early 2010s,

the commodities boom began to cool and Brazil started to experience the delayed impacts of the 2008 global financial crisis, limiting the PT government's capacity to continue to expand public investment in infrastructure and social programs. At the same time, right-wing political actors began to question the democratic rules of the game, after the 2014 centre-right presidential candidate Aecio Neves lost by a slim margin to the PT candidate for re-election, Dilma Rousseff, and refused to accept the results despite the non-existence of any objective indicators of electoral fraud. Concomitantly to this, the judiciary launched an attack on the PT's reputation through the *Lava Jato* (Car Wash) investigations into corruption in the state-owned oil company, Petrobras. These investigations were marked by partisan bias as the notoriously reactionary federal judge Sergio Moro, who led the trials, subjectively focused most of the attention of prosecutors and the mass media on allegations of crimes committed by PT leaders; there were also procedural irregularities, such as the illegal collusion between the team of prosecutors and Judge Moro, uncovered after the fact by investigative reporters in 2019.

The combination of heightened political polarization and severe economic downturn reached an unprecedented fever pitch in the country between 2016 and 2018. During this period, President Dilma Rousseff was impeached on highly questionable grounds. Her neoliberal vice-president, Michel Temer, assumed office but was unable or unwilling to end the crusade against the PT. Former president Lula was imprisoned and barred from running for president in 2018 due to the partisan *Lava Jato* investigations, and - with ample assistance from both the conventional mass media and fake news spread on social media platforms - the far-right Jair Bolsonaro was elected president in October 2018. Despite attempts to galvanize working-class sentiment against the 2016 impeachment and against Bolsonaro's candidacy in 2018, the Brazilian labour movement was tragically unable to stem the tide of democratic degradation, due in part to its own internal divisions as well as its prioritization of institutional spaces of social dialogue over rank-and-file mobilization during the time when its political allies were in power.

Another key factor which continues to inhibit the Brazilian labour movement's associative and institutional power today are the provisions of the 2017 anti-worker labour law reform, passed under the interim Temer administration. This thoroughgoing radically neoliberal reform modified more than 100 provisions in the 1943 Labour Code, faithfully mirroring the demands made by influential employers' associations such as the *Confederação Nacional da Industria* (CNI) to 'modernize' Brazilian labour legislation. Some of the most impactful changes introduced *vis-à-vis* this reform

were the introduction of new forms of precarious labour contracts such as the zero-hour *contrato intermitente* (intermittent contract), the creation of labour-management councils in medium and large enterprises that do not explicitly include union representatives, the introduction of a new judicial norm which allows for the negotiation of concessionary bilateral agreements that reduce labour standards below what is guaranteed under federal or state law, the imposition of new fees for low-income workers who attempt to access judicial remedies for labour law violations, and - perhaps most importantly for the labour movement - the elimination of the mandatory union tax, which the vast majority of union organizations depended on for their financial sustenance. Due to the norms in this labour law reform, as well as the broadly anti-union climate which has prevailed in Brazil since the fall of the Rousseff administration, unions have lost 97.5% of their revenue from these formerly mandatory contributions (Ferrari, 2022), and more than 2.9 million workers have disaffiliated from their respective unions since the law was enacted in 2017 (Silveira, 2020).

Unions under threat

The creation of a new far-right hegemony in the political arena, combined with the imposition of the neoliberal labour policies mentioned above, have created a situation in which Brazilian unions are under threat as institutions and Brazilian unionists are under personal threat as human and labour rights defenders. With regards to physical violence against labour activists, thankfully, the quantity of human rights abuses against Brazilian worker leaders in recent years has not approximated the extreme levels that have been reached in other Latin American countries such as Colombia or Guatemala, but nevertheless, they are not insignificant. Since 2018, anti-union violence has been especially concentrated against leaders of small farmers' and farmworkers' unions, as well as against journalists. Much of the violence against rural union leaders has intensified in parallel with the change in environmental policy under Bolsonaro, which has turned a blind eye to large-scale deforestation as well as encouraging mining and other extractive activities in the Amazon jungle and in other fragile biomes such as the Pantanal wetlands. The 2019 assassination of Carlos Cabral Pereira, president of the Rural Workers Union of Rio Maria in the Amazon-region state of Para, is an emblematic case. Cabral was a well-known labour and environmental rights advocate in the area, who was targeted by clandestine loggers and land grabbers since the decade of the 1990s. Encouraged by the violent rhetoric propagated by Bolsonaro, two gunmen (probably hired

by local landowners) felled Cabral outside of his home on 11 June, 2019 (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, 2019). To date, no one has been charged or even officially identified as a suspect by the police with regards to this heinous crime.

Two of the main strategies used by Bolsonaro to win the elections and to dispute hegemonic control of political discourse in Brazil were to repress free speech and to curate and disseminate large amounts of fake news, and because of this, journalists have been one group of workers particularly under attack since his rise to power. According to the National Federation of Journalists (FENAJ), in 2021 an investigative journalist from the state of Para and a popular radio announcer in the state of Bahia were brutally assassinated. Likewise, in 2021, two Brazilian journalists were arbitrarily detained, four were threatened with death, and journalists were physically attacked on 26 occasions, making that year the most dangerous on record for media workers since FENAJ began documenting these types of human rights abuses in the 1990s. It is important to mention that Bolsonaro himself was one of the principal aggressors against journalists – according to FENAJ, he made statements verbally abusing specific journalists and discrediting the work of the press 147 times during 2021 (FENAJ, 2022).

As alluded to earlier, under Bolsonaro, unions have had to struggle to maintain their institutional survival. From 2019 to 2021, the Bolsonaro administration enacted a series of temporary presidential decrees (*medidas provisorias*) that eliminated the ability of unions to deduct union dues automatically from workers' paycheques, as well as creating a two-tiered system of contracting for young workers (the *carteira verde amarela*) and limiting the collective bargaining powers of unions during the pandemic. Fortunately, the labour movement was able to mobilize sufficient resistance to these projects within the Brazilian Congress, thus preventing them from becoming permanently part of federal law. Despite these victories, unions have had serious difficulties in securing wage gains, due to their weakened associative power combined with a highly unfavourable labour market for workers. According to the labour research centre DIEESE, in 2021, 47.7% of all collective bargaining agreements signed in Brazil did not include a real wage increase, with negotiated wage adjustments failing to cover accumulated inflation for the year in 7775 agreements. By contrast, in 2018, only 9.3% of all collective bargaining agreements (equal to 1637 agreements) failed to achieve real wage increases for the workers covered under these instruments (DIEESE, 2022).

International condemnation

Given this (literal and figurative) scorched-earth panorama for workers and their organizations in Bolsonaro's Brazil, international solidarity is now imperative, more than ever. In 2021, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) included Brazil on its list of the ten worst countries in the world for working people, due to widespread violations of the rights to strike, to collectively bargain, and to organize. Similarly, the ILO Conference Committee on the Application of Standards included Brazil in its 2019 list of specific countries that seriously violate internationally recognized labour standards, with the Brazilian government condemned for systematic infractions of Convention 98, which protects the right to union organization and collective bargaining (ILO, 2019).

With help from allies in Europe and the Americas in particular, the Brazilian union movement has been able to successfully use global public tribunals such as those provided by the ILO and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to shine a light on the grave abuses workers have been subjected to in recent years. In addition, Brazilian unions have worked with these allies to provide vital information on labour rights violations to include in briefings to US and European policymakers, as a way of trying to condition trade and development co-operation policies to more thoroughgoing respect for human, labour and environmental rights. These advocacy actions have already notched up some successes, with the ratification of the European Union (EU)-MERCOSUL trade agreement currently at an impasse, due to the hesitancy of EU elected officials to sign an agreement with the Bolsonaro administration unless improvements are made regarding human rights standards and environmental stewardship in the Amazon region.

It is extremely important that international allies of the Brazilian labour movement remain vigilant, as Bolsonaro is already making credible threats that he will not respect the outcome of the 2022 presidential elections (if he is not chosen), setting the stage for a possible autocoup, along the lines of what was attempted by followers of Donald Trump in the USA on 6 January, 2021. If Bolsonaro succeeds in remaining in power beyond 2022 (using either constitutional or unconstitutional means), it is highly probable that the once-robust Brazilian democracy and union movement will be dealt a death blow by the dual scourges of neoliberalism and neo-fascism. Advocates for democracy and labour rights around the world must remain mobilized to ensure that this does not happen.

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Christopher Siu Tat Mung

Chapter 4. Hong Kong labour movement under totalitarian rule: oppression, resistance and anti-politics

On 1 July 2020, the 23rd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China, Beijing forcefully imposed the National Security Law (NSL) on Hong Kong, after months of protests in the city against the proposed Extradition Bill. The NSL has turned Hong Kong from an authoritarian society into a totalitarian one.

After the enactment of the NSL, political oppression has stepped up from suppressing protests on the streets to looming over the entire civil society. As of May 2022, more than 170 people were arrested under the pretext of endangering national security, among them 110 prosecuted (Gao Nuoheng, 2022). Many are key figures and activists in political parties and civil society organisations. Organisations and trade unions which have long supported civil society, such as the Civil Human Rights Front, the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China, the Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and many more had no choice but to disband under tremendous political pressure. There were crackdowns on independent and vocal media outlets. Students' unions were denied official standing by university management and barred from campus. Associations of professional groups, including lawyers, journalists, teachers and medical workers, were also purged by the regime.

After eliminating the dissidents from civil society, the regime subsequently introduced and reconfigured a new sociopolitical order that has swept through the legislature, law, education, media, the general workplace and other spheres. What Beijing has implemented in Hong Kong is far beyond 'retaliation' against the 2019 anti-extradition movement; it is a political project designed to put Hong Kong under totalitarian rule. As the totalitarian social order is taking shape, the boundary between the state and society is blurred, with the regime directly interfering with various social spheres. The once autonomous civic space has been severely diminished and is in grave danger.

Industrial relations restructured under totalitarian rule

For years, Hong Kong has lacked legal safeguards for the right to collective bargaining, and the labour rights legislation in the city is behind the times. As the undemocratic Legislative Council fails to address people's demands effectively, industrial actions almost become the last resort for workers to fight for their fair share. In the past three decades, all significant industrial actions in Hong Kong, including the bartenders' strike in 2007, the dock workers' strike in 2013 and Hoi Lai Estate cleaners' strike in 2018, were organised with the support of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) and its affiliates. Following the disbanding of HKCTU and the Professional Teachers' Union, other independent trade unions are increasingly isolated and fragmented. As the alliance of independent labour movements falls apart, it is a severe blow to workers' resistance against exploitation.

After the disbanding of HKCTU at the end of 2021, the pro-Beijing Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (HKFTU) will now have the monopoly to assume the role as workers' representatives. HKFTU, which has been a puppet of Beijing since the 1997 handover, will continue to prioritise maintaining social order over workers' rights. In the past, there were incidents when HKFTU condemned workers' strikes for 'disrupting harmonious industrial relations' and sabotaged industrial actions in many ways. Now free from the scrutiny of democratic unions, HKFTU and other pro-establishment unions are revealing themselves as state actors for maintaining stability. During the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, the Hong Kong government froze the minimum wage level for a second year straight, enforced mandatory vaccination for employees across various sectors and amended the Employment Ordinance to allow employers greater power to dismiss unvaccinated staff. After the elimination of independent labour centres, these policies came into force with minimum opposition.

Under the new political order, in addition to exerting pressure through the NSL, the regime also used the laws from the colonial period to impose strict political control over trade unions. At least five trade unions have received inquiry letters from the Trade Union Registry, asking them to provide details of their past participation in social movements and trade union activities, and threatening to cancel their registration under the Trade Union Ordinance. Among them, five committee members of the General Union of Hong Kong Speech Therapists were arrested by the authority on charges of seditious publication for publishing children's picture books, and the union was subsequently banned by the authority. The suppression of the trade unions created white terror, which immediately triggered a wave of trade

unions disbanding. In 2021, 23 trade unions applied for self-dissolution, increasing more than tenfold when compared with 2020. The regime also indicated that the Labour Department would monitor and regulate trade union organisations according to the NSL to ensure that they comply with the interests of national security.

Apart from that, totalitarianism has extended its political oppression to the general workplace by colluding with employers and management. A blatant attempt was the large-scale, politically motivated dismissals of airline workers. During the anti-extradition movement, at least 30 pilots, flight attendants and ground crew were dismissed by airlines, in retaliation for their involvement in the protests or their expression of political views on their personal social media accounts. After the enactment of the NSL, similar purges against employees escalated, spilling over from private enterprises and pro-Beijing institutions to the civil service, the education sector including universities, the media and other professional spheres. Employees are subjected to various forms of persecution, including warnings, transferal, demotion, lay-offs and even dismissal for holding dissident political views. The regime no longer adheres to its past doctrine of 'non-intervention' and neutrality in industrial relations, but seeks to abruptly intervene and suppress dissidents with state power.

Some capitalists even see the NSL as a political opportunity to strip trade unions of their power to resist, with an agenda of restructuring industrial relations. For example, within a month after the NSL came into effect, Cathay Pacific unilaterally issued a notice to permanently cease the year-end negotiations on wage and working conditions with its flight attendants' union, dismissing the negotiations as 'old-fashioned' and 'confrontational'. The airline subsequently even renounced the unions' right to use the union office. In the meantime, the collective bargaining agreement signed with the pilots' union was also unilaterally voided by the company. Both unions were among the very few Hong Kong unions that had a role in collective bargaining recognised by employers. Bargaining progress made by these unions used to serve as benchmarks for other unions when demanding pay rises. The Cathay Pacific incident not only dealt a devastating blow to unions in the civil aviation industry, but also undermined the general bargaining power of the working class in Hong Kong.

The politics of anti-politics: new forms of resistance movement

Under the threats posted by the NSL, any acts of resistance that challenge the political system and the regime's dominance now have very little room

to gather strength, as such resistance is faced with an enormous risk of being suppressed. Learning from the resistance movements of Eastern Europe in the 1970s, the dissidents in Poland, Czechoslovakia and other former Soviet states proposed to adopt 'the politics of anti-politics' as the backbone strategy for resistance (Ost, 1990) Temporarily shifting the focus away from a change of state or seizing political power, anti-politics strives to defend civil rights and people's autonomous ways of living. However, anti-politics differs from the simple notion of remaining apolitical. Dissidents in Eastern Europe were profoundly aware that, if the ultimate goal of a totalitarian regime is to fully control every aspect of social life, any attempt to defend an autonomous way of living will eventually clash and conflict with the state power, turning into another form of politics.

In the past year, despite Hong Kong turning into a totalitarian city, resistance did not perish when people's basic rights and survival were infringed. In May 2021, sales workers at Coca Cola went on strike for three days to protest against the company's new salary system and outsourcing plan. In October 2021, dozens of construction workers organised themselves without a union to block roads to demand their unpaid wages. In November 2021, hundreds of Foodpanda delivery workers launched a two-day strike to protest against the increasingly hostile wage and working conditions. This resistance did not only oppose capitalist exploitation, but also challenged undemocratic industrial relations.

Although the HKCTU was forced to disband, autonomous labour movements will survive as independent unions continue their work in the workplace, gathering strength in bottom-up workers' resistance. Through vocational training, handling labour disputes and intervention in industrial actions, unions maintain day-to-day contact with workers. In light of the political reality, trade unions are becoming more cautious when getting involved in industrial actions. Unlike past practices of leading industrial actions under the spotlight, they now keep a low profile and play a supportive role behind the scenes, for example facilitating media relations and advising on negotiation strategies. Various enterprise-based unions focus on a wide range of labour rights issues in the workplace, such as resisting unjust policies during the pandemic and fighting for the equal treatment of discriminated employees. Members of various unions also spontaneously initiate actions to counteract political infiltration. In a recent general election of an aviation union, members successfully initiated a vote of no-confidence to veto pro-government candidates becoming executive board members. Citing Antonio Gramsci, the resistance strategy nowadays has changed from a war of manoeuvre to a war of position.

Nevertheless, when the regime resorts to the Trade Unions Ordinance, the out-of-date colonial legislation, to restrict unions or even threaten to deregister them, it is time for workers in defiance to explore new forms of self-organisation that go beyond unions. The Foodpanda strike last year was not led by unions, but initiated by a few south-east Asian delivery workers who formed Telegram groups and managed to connect with more than 800 workers on the first day. The number snowballed to 1700, providing massive support for a strike (Li Huiyun, 202). Such sporadic, anonymous and informal organisation not only overcame the hurdles of dispersed workstations and limited mobility, it also helped to evade government intervention and suppression from the management. In the foreseeable future, as conventional unions face tightening political control, more similar informal labour organisations, such as groups on social media, issue-based concern groups, workers' mutual groups and workplace committees will emerge.

These self-organised labour organisations and networks, as well as independent unions in various sectors and enterprises, do not exist on their own. Instead, they join forces with self-organised resistance in other social spheres to gradually form a 'second culture' or 'parallel structure' independent of the regime (Havel, 1992). An obvious example of such a parallel structure in the economic sector is the 'yellow economic circle' formed during the anti-extradition movement. The yellow economic circle is mainly composed of small businesses that support democracy and consumers who shop at like-minded businesses and boycott pro-Beijing capitalists. Some business owners are also willing to provide employment opportunities for released political prisoners or contribute to the social movement in different ways. Self-organised resistance also emerges in other social spheres. As independent media close down or succumb to state control, more and more independent citizen journalists emerge. As district councillors and mutual aid committees are dismissed, different forms of mutual aid networks mushroom in the community. As political brainwashing looms over regular schools, more off-campus self-learning and cultural exchanges are put into practice. As Polish Marxist philosopher Leszek Kołakowski (1971) said, although the resistance defending our independent autonomous way of life may not lead to an instant reform of the social system, it can nevertheless resist or undermine the encroachment of totalitarian rule on our society, and in many ways offer its members a reasonable life.

Conclusion

Hong Kong's new political order is in the making, as the regime strives to install its totalitarian political project. Hong-Kongers with the determination to resist will continue to challenge and clash with the expanding political power in different social spheres. The resistance of exploited workers never perishes – while independent labour movements reorganise themselves from scratch and consolidate their work on enterprise or sectoral levels, new forms of self-organised labour movements are emerging. In contrast to the large-scale social movement in the previous phase, new resistance movements are more discreet and engage in non-political confrontation, akin to the dissident movements across Eastern Europe in the 1970s which upheld the politics of anti-politics. When different forms of self-organised labour resistance interact with social movements to defend our way of living, this complex and intertwining civil network has the potential to develop into the bridgehead against totalitarianism.

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Section 2. Challenges of Data Collection

Fundizwi Sikhondze

Chapter 5. Research in a hostile political environment

Research may often be a component in building solidarity against authoritarianism, whether inside and outside an affected country. Such attempts to broaden and deepen understanding of people's experience must traverse via the agonising but necessary task of conducting field work to collect data. Collecting data, from afar, may seem a simple, routine task in a normal environment, to the extent that no-one bothers to factor in the fact that there could be a civil unrest, war and other disturbances in the area from which the data needs to be collected when they craft their research and data collection strategy.

Perhaps the exception to the rule may be specialist researchers conducting research on the very subject of civil unrest or war. Researchers such as Wood (2006) have gone to the extent of producing academic work directing researcher practitioners how to go about conducting research in such environments. Such researchers would more often than not be highly experienced, or be adequately supported by international institutions to handle awkward or generally unsafe situations that may arise in their journey.

In the case of institutions such as the Swiss Centre for Scientific Research, Bonfoh et al. (2011) opined that they had operated in the Ivory Coast for more than 60 years and have continued operating through wars and civil strife and have also gathered and expressed advice to the international research community as far as continuing to carry out research work during the rough war or unrest periods. Their secret has been to keep an apolitical line and to use local leadership who may understand better how to avert danger when needs arise.

For individual researchers conducting post-graduate research, such as this researcher, things may be somewhat different for reasons that include that such researchers are often all alone during the data collection. The year 2021 was a research data collection year for this researcher and by coincidence was also a year when eSwatini went through an unprecedented winter of discontent, from around the month of May. Data needed to be collected in eSwatini, primarily through interviewing informal sector workers. Even now, at the beginning of June 2022, there are remnants of the civil unrest and worse conditions are emerging where there has been rampant burning

of properties of members of the ruling government, as well as those of the pro-democracy activists.

At first, the discontent could be characterised as a mass protest movement of young people delivering petitions to constituency Members of Parliament (MPs). The petitions captured grievances ranging from social challenges facing the community to the creation of employment opportunities to the introduction of a new political system in which government is elected, different from the appointment that currently takes place.

By the middle of June the protest movement had grown bigger in numbers and in geographical spread, threatening to cover each and every inch of the country. The regime started to press panic buttons and immediately moved to contain it by firstly using the Covid-19 pandemic as an excuse to ban all manner of protests and violently breaking up protests that were convened thereafter.

In the aftermath of the ensuing standoff the country descended into a mass protest movement (others called it a civil unrest) which unfortunately had several violent streaks. The first violent strand emerged in the form of banditry elements who seem to have taken advantage of the situation to install check points along the major travel routes into and out of the urban areas. At these impromptu check points, the public was forced to pay in order to be allowed to pass. To ensure compliance the protesters would at times threaten to burn the vehicles with the occupants inside.

Another related strand of the protest movement involved the extensive destruction of retail commercial property worth over $150 million, according to the Eswatini government, countrywide. Retail outlets were looted, ransacked and in many cases burnt down, perhaps to conceal evidence.

In the state of confusion that ensued, where uncertainty reigned supreme, the government implemented devastating mobile network shutdowns, perhaps to control the flow of information in the hope that the tide of protests could be broken. The government also went on a murder spree, in the process killing more than 80 citizens, according to Amnesty International.

For informal workers who ply their trade in urban spaces, the situation could have been an extra traumatic experience because they were just emerging from the period where Covid-19 health regulations had adversely affected their operations, during which, for instance, informal workers would be instructed to keep away from their urban trading spaces. When they would eventually resume operations they would be given strict regulations that reduced the number of days on which they could trade. They also had to go through trading in cities that had a reduced number of potential customers

because, for a while, the public was also discouraged from entering urban spaces, to control Covid-19.

Swarna et al. (2022) write that, globally, informal workers lost around 60% of their income due to the safety measures taken to restrain the spread of the Covid-19 virus but also due to the reduced income of potential customers resulting from job losses or layoffs that took place due to mainly small businesses losing business during the pandemic. The conditions of uncertainty, lack of safety, lack of public transport, and no public allowed in urban cities all meant a lack of earnings for informal workers.

The civil unrest continued in moments of upturn of activities and then downturns where an uneasy calm would return. For instance, on 14 July, King Mswati III called a big national meeting to discuss the unfolding situation in the country. The pro-democracy movement in turn called for protest action in Manzini city to counter the occasion of the king. The state unleashed violence to disperse the crowds in Manzini on the day and there were battles all over the city, with police breaking up small groups of pro-democracy protesters, preventing them from holding their peaceful protest. There were also other significant protests such as the public transport workers in early October and the public sector protest that was also violently put down by the state.

In the specific case of conducting post-graduate research on informal sector workers in Manzini, the most populous city in eSwatini in the aforementioned period, these were some of the background issues that informed the state of mind of informal workers.

One of the realities that faced the researcher was the fact that, given the civil unrest, it became quite difficult to move around the country freely because threats of violence lingered in the air even during quieter periods and because of sporadic operations of public transport. Further, informal workers are usually in front row seats as witnesses to state violence when such takes place in urban spaces, because they trade on the sidewalks and pavements all over the city. Their point of reference for events is to relay what they saw on the day in question. Given their exposure to the events of the period, and despite their risk of reduced earnings and pressure from the state for everyone to resume normal activities, informal workers somewhat consciously reduced their frequency in coming to the cities during the period.

When faced with the continuous absence of potential research interviewees, a researcher is likely to switch their data collection method or strategy. In this case data collection from a personally administered, face-to-face questionnaire would have to be changed to another strategy, such as using mobile phones. However other challenges emerged that limited the

implementation of these changes because the regime switched the mobile cellphone network on and off as a strategy to curtail free flow of information amongst the citizens.

Thirdly, there may have been anxiety issues amongst informal workers related to their survival and lack of it; therefore in that period, they would not be enthusiastic about taking part in research work. The researcher would be kept waiting, given a short period in which to conduct the interview and given vague and therefore unhelpful answers to the questions as a result.

In conclusion, the conduct of research can be an exciting learning journey for emerging researchers in non-authoritarian regimes, but the political environment can have a strong effect on how research would be conducted and how the outcomes of the research will unfold. The case of eSwatini in the late-2021 season of discontent was a good case study of this situation. Researchers wishing to bring depth to the understanding of labour under authoritarian regimes face a difficult task without institutional support. While research is undoubtedly important and valuable, international allies need to understand that quality research is not easy in such conditions, and may have to rely on less formal ways of knowledge production, especially the experience, networking and reports of those organising under those conditions.

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Section 3. Pushed into Politics

Başak Kocadost

Chapter 6. Deepening economic inequality and authoritarianism: the need for a democratic alliance in Turkey

The excessive depreciation of the Turkish Lira and high inflation are causing a serious decrease in the purchasing power of the Turkish people. While the state's statistics agency, at the end of January 2022, announced a yearly 48.7% inflation rate, independent research groups calculated it at around 114.9% (ENAG 2022). In this context, the 50% increase in the minimum wage announced by the government for 2022 is far from sufficient in the face of rapid impoverishment. The increases in wages and salaries remain below the inflation rate. Small businesses are in a difficult situation, especially because of the recent increase in rents and utility bills. Farmers have serious difficulties in sustaining their lives as agricultural production is highly dependent on imports. The situation of informal workers who have suffered throughout 2021 due to the pandemic is also getting worse.

The government tries to evade responsibility by blaming chain markets, the so called 'dollar lobby', foreign powers and so on, as if it were not itself the architect of this impoverishment. As the government is promoting loans with its low interest policy, households are more and more stuck in debt. Household debt has increased 138 times in the last 18 years (Indyturk 2021). Workers are trying to survive far below the poverty line while facing increasing debt burden and fear of unemployment. According to the Disk-Ar union report, the unemployment rate is 22.1%, while youth and women's unemployment is even higher (Diskar 2022). In such an environment, young people see no future: seven out of ten young people wish to live abroad (Sputnik 2022).

However, it would be rather apolitical to expect the economic crisis to automatically turn into a political opposition against the government, even though public anger has undoubtedly increased in response to these deteriorating economic conditions. The year 2022 has indeed started with protests and strikes. Couriers and delivery workers, in particular, have launched wildcat strikes as their yearly wage increases fall below the inflation rate even though the companies they work for have dramatically increased their profits during the pandemic. As in the case of the food delivery giant Yemeksepeti, workers are protesting the company's union busting actions

as well as demanding decent wages. Indeed, in Turkey, it is very difficult for a union to gain the authorization to make a collective agreement in a workplace due to the existing laws. In addition, companies are trying to rule out the few, barely organized unions with a wide variety of tactics. Despite all this, workers in many sectors such as textiles, metal and delivery have started workplace-based actions on their own. In addition, students, neighbourhood residents, in short, ordinary people, have organized in different parts of the country under the slogan 'we can't sustain ourselves' against the increasing cost of living and bills, despite the government's strong crackdown on any kind of street opposition.

Lacking perspective

Without a pro-labour agenda, the National Alliance, the opposition alliance led by the CHP (Republican People's Party) and İYİ Party against the AKP-MHP[1], lacks the perspective to connect with the social opposition that people are currently trying to articulate. Instead of enlarging or strengthening the small-scale actions that people have organized in different parts of the country, and building a political strength from there, the National Alliance has remained silent in the face of government's pressure against these actions and has left these movements unclaimed. At the most expressing timid support for labour actions, it is not clear what this alliance promises to labour. Rather than address the crucial economic and social problems, they are only pressing for early elections by preparing a joint declaration for the return to the parliamentary system.

Thus, by disdaining to organize social unrest and to build an opposition and a popular program around peoples' concrete demands, the National Alliance is both accepting the government's terrorization of street opposition, and, by not acting, even jeopardizing its victory in a possible election. By not allowing any genuine opposition, the government narrows the political field. The sole call for a return to the parliamentary system, devoid of economic and social content, is not enough to form a powerful, convincing, and hence popularly supported opposition.

1 The MHP (Nationalist Movement Party), as a part of the AKP-MHP alliance currently in power, is an ultra-nationalist right-wing party. As for the opposition National Alliance, the İYİ Party (Good Party) is a liberal, nationalist party founded by a group that split from the MHP. The CHP (Republican People's Party) is the oldest party in the country, founded by Atatürk. As a secular and republican party, it includes mixed elements such as social democracy and nationalism.

However, the National Alliance's stance is not simply a tactical mistake. The ideology of its member parties does not allow for any other political strategy. Apart from the fact that they do not have a clear program in favour of labour, their excluding of the HDP[2] from the alliance reveals their understanding of democracy, even though they claim to defend it. The fact that HDP cadres and leadership have been in prison for a long time and that the party is under heavy pressure from the state calls for condemnation by the opposition in the name of democracy. However, in addition to excluding the HDP from their alliance, the parties in the National Alliance are supporting the case for the closure of the HDP. The İYİ Party, true to its nationalist stance, has indeed already announced that it will vote in favour of the closure of the HDP. The CHP too is unsupportive of the HDP, whether because of its own nationalist conviction or doing so tactically because of the fear of alienating part of its more conservative and nationalistic base or because of its wish to take votes from the AKP's social base. Whatever the actual reason may be, CHP is choosing to make an alliance on a nationalist basis; instead of actively reaching out to protest movements and progressive forces, it manoeuvres itself into the nationalist and conservative frame predefined by the very government. In addition, the anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies of the National Alliance show its nationalistic views and discriminatory attitude at a time when racist attacks against immigrants are increasing. The National Alliance, as it stands, exactly presents the kind of opposition that the government could only wish for.

Not just a smokescreen

The Turkish government's repression against the social opposition, especially against the women's and LGBTI+ movements, is well known. In 2021, the government withdrew from the Istanbul Convention, the European Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women. The government also has not allowed LGBTI+ pride parades for years. This year, even the use of symbols such as rainbows and unicorns on commercial products was banned. During a recent speech at a mosque, President Erdoğan recently targeted the famous pop singer Sezen Aksu, threatening to 'pull out her tongue' on the grounds that a song she made five years ago insulted the Prophet Adam and Eve. Some opposition forces underestimate these attacks by saying that they are simply 'cultural issues' being used by

2 The HDP (The People's Democratic Party) is a pro-Kurdish-movement, left-wing party defending participatory and radical democracy.

the government as a 'diversion' tactic to cover up the existing economic situation. However, silence against these attacks does not lead to a labour struggle; moreover it contributes to reinforcing the state's authoritarianism. The fact that the opposition has not been able to collectively respond to these attacks is not making it stronger either in the economic area nor against the government in general. Not only is the government trying to divide people into cultural camps and to consolidate its own religious social base by playing on cultural dualities, but it is also increasing its authoritarianism and obliterating any possible opposition. Hence, attacks against women's and LGBTI+ movements or popular figures are not just a smokescreen to disguise its actual agenda or divert attention, but are a constituent element of its authoritarianism. Through these open attacks, Erdoğan intensifies the climate of oppression and fear and thus criminalizes even the most basic human rights and those who give voice to these rights. While Turkey already has the highest incarceration rate among the 47 member states of the Council of Europe, 216 new prisons have been built in the last six years, and 18 new prisons are planned to be opened in 2022 (Kizilkaya and Bakile 2021) - not to mention that most of them are being built using prisoner labour.

Despite an environment in which almost no demonstrations are allowed in the streets, and where those who oppose the government, be it even via social media posts, face the threat of lawsuits and imprisonment, workers' protests are on the rise, and peasant actions and feminist struggles are still being carried out, often without the umbrella of a party or union. At the same time, radical left parties such as the HDP, TİP (Workers' Party of Turkey) and EMEP (Labour Party) have started negotiations to form a third alliance, the 'Democracy Alliance'. There is an urgent need for a political approach that connects with social movements, organizes together in these struggles, and is fed by these struggles. A new alliance should seek to combine these social forces and understand politics not only in electoral terms. Only such an alliance can enable people to have a say in their own lives, increase the power of collective action, and thus build a genuine counter power against AKP authoritarianism by opening up a real political space.

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Moreblessing Nyambara

Chapter 7. From liberation to repression: trade unions in post-colonial Zimbabwe

Since Independence in 1980, the democratic and economic spaces in Zimbabwe have been perpetually shrinking. The shrinking democratic space is in many ways reflective of the survivalist strategies of the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), which epitomise the regime's authoritarian style of ruling. It seems highly improbable that such an environment could be the most conducive for labour union bodies and other civic organisations to operate in. However, when one revisits particular historical junctures in Zimbabwe's labour union history, it is anti-factual to suggest that the combination of state authoritarianism and economic crisis under the Robert Mugabe regime and ZANU–PF have rendered the labour movement completely useless.

Indeed, in the forty-one years of independence, there have been mixed fortunes in the progress of the post-colonial labour movement. On the whole, the labour movement's greatest obstacle has been a lack of political will by successive governments to support labour unions and the workers' cause. Workers remain underrepresented and unaware of their labour rights. This article concludes that, in order to prop up the labour movement in Zimbabwe, more pressure needs to be exerted on the Zimbabwean government to open up the democratic space by promoting democratic institutions. Regional and international bodies also have a central role in their advocacy not only for the advancement of labour rights in Zimbabwe but also for human rights in general. Furthermore, education on labour issues at the grassroots, using existing labour union structures in a bottom-to-top approach, may be a great tool towards advancing a more robust and holistic agenda for worker militancy in Zimbabwe. Overall, the trade union movement has to put on its agenda a global agenda and create solidarity with labour organisations globally.

The colonial legacy

Historically, the labour movement in Zimbabwe had not always been malleable to state pressure. This is attributable to the highly political nature of the labour unions.

Since the colonial period, labour unions and worker militancy were hardly ever divorced from the politics of the day. During the struggle for political independence in the post-World War Two period, successive and successful Black nationalist organisations mobilised their support from the workers. Early nationalist movements recognised the latent political potential within the black proletariat. Mutually, black middle and lower class citizens saw labour unions as representing their agendas through wider political issues beyond the parochial issues of wages and living and working conditions. Therefore, at Independence, the ruling party, ZANU-PF, had trade unionists at its helm and within its ranks. In a twist of events that was not surprising, the newly elected black majority government under Robert Mugabe began to feel threatened by the same labour movement from which it had rallied its support in the struggle for independence.

After many failed promises, the agitation spread from among many social and economic groups, and it was not long before the government felt compelled to suppress the labour movement as well as any form of opposition. The politics of survival became the hallmark of ZANU-PF's political ambitions and its authoritarianism. Within the context of a state with genocidal tendencies, the labour movement has never gained much traction (Saunders, 2001). During these nascent days, the government attempted to keep its tentacles in the labour movement and control it from within by appointing proxy leadership. Notwithstanding such attempts, the labour movement, through the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), remained significantly autonomous. It is unclear how the political structures of the ZCTU managed to continuously wriggle out of the thorny grips of the state; but for nearly an entire decade since Independence, the labour movement became one of the fiercest and most active opponents of government policies. A case in point: in 1991, the ZCTU was quick to caution the government against adopting neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs. This was at a time when other countries were reeling from the negative effects of SAPs. Such effects were clearly evident among workers through declining wages and per capita indices. During the next decade, the labour movement mutated and became more overt and confrontational as a response to the government's nonchalant attitude and the adoption of ruinous SAPs. Although the ZCTU had previously been the sole voice against government corruption and misgovernance, during the 1990s, civic

organisations also mobilised from among the working classes' riotous actions. While the labour movement became more confrontational by expressing the plight of the working class, the state deflected and became overt in its ways of suppressing this discontent. In 1997, numerous labour strikes were ruthlessly suppressed in an open show of the government's power to quell discontent among its citizens.

Crisis and unionism

At the end of 1997, Zimbabwe went into a decade of the political and economic crisis that others have referred to as the lost decade (Raftopoulos, 2009). On the one hand, economic mismanagement had led the economy to a grinding halt. Politically, ZANU-PF went through an identity crisis through waning support. The party's political relevance was becoming even more questionable with the rise of a more formidable opponent, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC was again birthed by the labour movement, with its high ranking officials being former leaders of the ZCTU. The ZCTU itself became highly political and supported the MDC in urging Western countries to impose sanctions on the Robert Mugabe regime. Although sanctions were intended to force ZANU-PF and elite party cohorts out of repressive attitudes, there is no doubt that sanctions also affected the working class and ordinary Zimbabweans. Therefore, some have argued that supporting the MDC and politicisation of the labour movement by the ZCTU terminally weakened its organic basis in the working class (Paris, 2013). Furthermore, the heavy involvement of workers in the politics of the nation as forces of political opposition to ZANU-PF provided the government with a trump card to unleash organised violence on the labour movement, particularly the urban working classes.

Members of the opposition party and labour unions were subjected to abductions, arbitrary arrests and torture for organising strikes and other forms of industrial action. The government continued to press for the replacement of union leaders with government agents to subvert industrial action calls. Using a combination of violence, undemocratic legislation and harmful economic policies, the Zimbabwean government considerably weakened the labour movement during the crisis period. Union support became weak due to a combination of fear and the fact that the economic crisis forced many workers into the informal sector, which reduced the number of workers affiliated with labour unions. Even beyond the crisis period, evidence reveals that Zimbabwean workers generally fall out of

the ambit of labour union representation, especially at the grassroots in informal employment (Sauti, 2020).

Pressure from the region and beyond

Even though most of the trade unions in Zimbabwe are recognised as affiliated to global union and labour federations such as the International Labour Organisation, there has not been enough pressure exerted on the Zimbabwean government to free up the democratic space to allow trade unions the ability to articulate their agendas. Regional bodies such as the Southern African Development Committee have thus far been reluctant to intervene due to the geopolitical concerns within the region. Within the country's borders, the political and economic environment has often left political leaders polarised with regard to the correct position to adopt on the relationship between the state and labour unions. While the 2018 inaugurated government promised a new style of governance, its position on the labour movement still remains quite ambiguous.

In conclusion: the labour movement in Zimbabwe has been responsible for the articulation of broader political issues. This political flair has led the Zimbabwe government to become highly acrimonious against the labour movement. The only clear cut government policy towards the labour movement has been repression, which is linked to the ruling party's survivalist strategies. There thus remains much-limited representation and information about trade unions at grassroots for Zimbabweans.

Although outside observers have continued to put pressure on the Zimbabwean government to reconsider its position on democracy and civil rights, the ruling party has remained divorced from the labour movement.

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Section 4. When Labour Laws Restrict Labour

Fundizwi Sikhondze

Chapter 8. Abuse of the labour court to suppress Eswatini public sector workers struggles

The government of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) is viscerally repressive, a course that has aided its survival for decades as an undemocratic regime. State violence is the weapon of choice they employ to supress workers and to prevent them from freely organising and mobilising for their human and trade union rights.

In carrying out a comprehensive programme to repress workers, the government requires more than just the armed forces but often ropes in other parts of the state. In the case of the eSwatini government, to complement their armed repression of workers, they rely on a tightly controlled media space as well as on a highly manipulated industrial court system. In the midst of an economic downturn that ensued from 2016 and that has worsened since the Covid-19 period, wherein austerity measures have been the most favoured response, public service workers have engaged in mass protests in order to protect their jobs, wages and generally their workplace rights from the government. Repression from the state has been the consistent response.

The tight control of the media produces an outcome whereby the media effectively functions to whitewash the actions of the government. The eSwatini electronic and print media spaces have historically been dominated either by state media outlets or private media, who only survived by applying high levels of self-censorship. For instance, the dominant privately owned newspaper group, the Times of eSwatini group, and a small private television station (Channel Yemaswati), have both long toed the line and are constantly conducting self-censorship to the point that often the difference in reporting between the so-called privately owned independent media and state media is negligible.

The Industrial Court in eSwatini (particularly in instances where the government is either a litigant or respondent) functions on the other hand to endorse or to give a legal cover to state repressive actions. The court of industrial disputes has increasingly becoming a useful tool at the hands of the repressive regime to legitimise its decisions and those of its armed forces, in the process abandoning its role of a just and fair arbiter of industrial disputes. To achieve this outcome the government had long orchestrated a

strategy to tame the judicial officers by engaging them on an acting basis (short, fixed term contracts). Such an arrangement goes a long way in ensuring that judicial officers are vulnerable and therefore easy to manipulate and control.

One of the most recent victims of the industrial court was the Swaziland Democratic Nurses Union (SWADNU) who, since 2020, have attempted to utilise the court to fight for better conditions at the workplace for nurses, including seeking a declaratory order that the government has been negligent for not adequately protecting health workers from the Covid-19 pandemic. They also sought a danger allowance for nurses and health workers in general with respect to the danger presented to nurses by the Covid-19 battle, and better equipment to enable nurses and health workers to better manage Covid-19 with patients (Eswatini Labour Insights 2021).

Court fails essential nurses

All their efforts have yielded no fair hearing, let alone a decision from the court which is legislatively expected to give necessary priority to nurses' grievances. This is a right nurses should enjoy as a consequence of their being categorised as essential service who therefore cannot legally engage in strike action as a grievance-handling mechanism.

The Covid-19 challenges layered on top of challenges that can be traced back to around the 2016 financial year, the first year in which the eSwatini economy went into a technical recession and when austerity measures were implemented, causing the Public Service Unions (PSUs)[1] to intensify mass protests. The recession, as pointed out by the IMF (2019), was caused by the fact that from 2016 the country experienced drastically reduced income from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU)[2], in the process causing increased public debt, drastic reduction in international reserves and a sluggish GDP growth. The Covid-19 pandemic and its negative economic effects from 2020 blew the already brewing crisis of a neoliberal, austerity focused and repressive government into the open.

1 National Public Service and Allied Workers Union (NAPSAWU), Swaziland Democratic Nurses Union (SWADNU), the Swaziland National Association of Teachers (SNAT) and Swaziland National Association of Government Accounts Personnel (SNAGAP).

2 SACU is a customs union created by Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa in 1910. It facilitates the Common External Tarrif, free movement of manufactured goods between SACU counties and distribution of customs and excise revenue collected by the union.

Austerity worsened in 2020 because the government took Covid-19 support loans from both the IMF (US$130 million) and the World Bank (US$45.2 million). These institutions attached the Fiscal Adjustment Roadmap (FAR) as a condition for accessing their loan facilities. Through the FAR the government (amongst others) pledged to consolidate or save 6.5% expenditure from the wage bill over the next three financial years.

These austerity measures have incensed and agitated PSUs and strengthened their resolve to fight harder for their benefits at work but also have elicited the worst violent response from the eSwatini state, with sufficient cover from the industrial court. Despite the hardships, PSUs have stood firm in demanding that the government ought to conduct of a review of their salaries. The review of salaries in 2020 had been part of a collective bargaining agreement signed between the PSUs and the government in the 2016/17 financial year wherein parties had agreed to conduct the next salary review exercise in 2020.

The government has so far flatly refused to honour the agreement citing tough economic conditions (Rikjernberg, 2021).

Scores injured, global solidarity

To apply pressure on the government, the PSUs convened a protest on 20 October 2021 in Mbabane, the capital city of eSwatini. All legal steps, including acquiring permission from the city council, had been followed by the PSUs. However, on the eve of the protest, the Commissioner General of Police banned the protest, citing 'state security'.

On the day of the protest, police and other security agencies violently dispersed workers who had insisted on exercising their rights by coming out to protest despite the ban by the Police Commissioner General. They injured scores of workers and left at least one person dead on the day. International media showed images of the armed forces shooting occupants inside a bus they had stopped which was on its way to the protest in Mbabane.

In the short period after this protest, the eSwatini government has escalated their intimidation of PSUs by threatening to revoke their recognition agreements. In correspondence directed at PSUs (individually) in November 2021 (Tsabedze 2021), the government used the ongoing political unrest to accuse the trade union leaders of immersing themselves in national politics and not in any way pursuing workers interests. In a meeting convened on 3 December 2021 between the trade union NAPSAWU and the government, the government verbally communicated that they sought to revoke the

union's recognition agreement as a punishment for NAPSAWU fighting for its member's rights during this period where the state is desperate to maintain silence because the country is also in the throes of a civil unrest.

In the midst of all the repression, eSwatini workers enjoy strong solidarity from global trade union organisations. Organisations such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) and the South African Federation of Trade Unions (SAFTU) have both held campaigns in solidarity with eSwatini workers. Further, the Southern African Trade Union Coordinating Council (SATUCC), together with the International Trade Union Confederation (Africa Regional Office) have hosted online solidarity meetings and made strong statements in solidarity with eSwatini workers. More recently the ITUC (Brussels) launched a campaign to pressure the Commonwealth to suspend eSwatini for its violation of the Commonwealth charter.

Global union federations such as Education International (EI), IndustriAll Global Union, the International Transport Federation (ITF) and the Public Services International, to name but a few, have also kept their solidarity machinery focused on eSwatini and have kept the spirit of eSwatini workers up.

As the year 2022 takes off, and as daggers are already drawn between the government and public sector workers on the issue of the salary review, there are expected battles in the courts and on the streets and, with the state having propensity to repress workers, solidarity shall be an important pressure point for workers to lean on.

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Svetlana Kolganova

Chapter 9. Without rights to strike or against discrimination: trade union rights in Russia

This chapter was written before Russian troops invaded Ukraine.

This article attempts to describe the context in which trade unions in Russia operate. It elucidates recent legislation in Russia that has contributed to worsening workers' rights and human rights in the country, and the strategies implemented by one of the trade union centres[1] in the country — the Confederation of Labour of Russia (the KTR) which was formed after the collapse of the USSR — to avert the attacks on freedom of association and civil rights.

Violations of human and trade unions' rights

Formally, freedom of association is guaranteed in Russia, although in practice workers experience serious difficulties in realising it. There are two systematic problems: 1) restrictions on collective labour disputes, including a de facto ban on strikes, and 2) no protection against discrimination based on union membership.

Restrictions applied to strikes include a quorum required for a strike ballot, and long and formalised procedure. Also, legislation does not allow a solidarity strike, a strike aimed at recognising a trade union, or a strike in order to criticize a government's economic and social policies. Moreover, strikes are generally prohibited for workers in certain industries, for example railway transport, air transport, public servants and other categories.

The formal legal prohibition of discrimination based on union membership is not provided with an effective mechanism of protection against violations by the employer. In particular, there are no special rules of proof

1 The other trade union center is the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), which is the successor of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (Trade Union Center of the USSR). The FNPR inherited the experience of Soviet-era trade unions which were a built-in part of the State machinery. At the core of this experience is a paternalistic model of labour relations, in the center of which is the state which makes key decisions.

of discrimination that places the burden of proof on the employer rather than the employee. Moreover, the courts often do not react in any way to the statements about discrimination and do not establish the facts of discrimination, thereby encouraging employers to continue such behaviour in the future.

Some provisions of the Russian Labour Code and the practice of enforcement related to collective labour resolution and discrimination against trade union leaders were the subject of the recommendations of the International Labour Organization regarding ILO conventions 87 and 98.[2] However, these recommendations have not been implemented.

Meanwhile, violations of civil rights and freedoms are worsening and civil society organisations have come under increased pressure in recent years. In 2010 until 2012, there was a growth of the protest movement in the Russian Federation. The most striking were the so-called 'Bolotnaya protests' after the elections of the State Duma in 2011 (Kommersant, 2021). The state responded by 'tightening the nuts', in particular by restricting freedom of assembly and NGOs activities.

In 2012, the status of the organization 'foreign agent' applicable to NGOs was introduced into Russian legislation. This status, in addition to the negative label, entailed obligations for registration as a 'foreign agent'; labelling the materials published or distributed (including through the media or the Internet) by the NGO, with an indication that these materials are published or distributed by a NGO acting as a 'foreign agent'; regular reporting to the Ministry of Justice (annually submit financial statements with an audit report; once every six months, a report on its activities and on the personnel of the governing bodies; quarterly, documents on the purpose of spending money and using other property); as well as the threat of fines and even liquidation in case of non-compliance with these requirements.

In 2018, on the grounds of violations of these requirements, Interregional Trade Union Workers' Association (ITUWA) was under the threat of liquidation. After the KTR submitted a complaint to the ILO and started a public campaign in support of the ITUWA, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation overturned the court's decision, stating that there were insufficient violations in trade union activities to make decisions on the liquidation. In 2022 the oldest human rights organization, 'Memorial' was liquidated due to alleged violations of requirements of the foreign agent legislation. In 2017-2020 the legislation on 'foreign agents' was tightened. From

2 Case No 2758 (Russian Federation), 2010; Case No 2251 (Russian Federation), 2003; Case No 2216 (Russian Federation), 2002.

2017 this status became applicable to media; from 2019, to individuals; from 2020, to associations without official entity.

Currently the status of 'foreign agent' specifically targets independent journalists. The compelled abandonment of Russia by journalists and other threats to free journalism were highlighted in the speech of the editor of *Novaya Gazeta*, Dmitry Muratov (Muratov, 2021).

The coronavirus pandemic has also contributed to further restrictions of civil rights and freedoms. Before the pandemic, trade unions, as part of civil society, experienced difficulties in conducting collective protest actions. What is more, Covid-19 has led to their complete ban on the grounds of protecting public health.

Influence of the situation in the region

Other former Soviet Union states also face similar challenges caused by the transformation of labour relations. In the region, attempts by states to control the activities of independent trade unions are noted. The impact of such attempts varies by country (Buketov, 2014). In countries where independent trade unions exist or existed, the most serious problems are in Kazakhstan and Belarus.

In Kazakhstan, independent trade unions have been liquidated. In 2017, Kazakhstan was included in the list of the ten worst countries by the International Trade Union Confederation due to a significant deterioration in labour legislation and practice. The International Labour Organization has formulated recommendations to bring national labour standards and practices in line with ILO standards.

According to the KTR's recent statement on the socio-political crisis in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2022, the liquidation of independent unions and lack of social dialog contributed to this crisis (KTR, 2021). Additionally it draws attention to the connection between the processes taking place in Kazakhstan and the rights and interests of trade union members within the KTR, and their direct impact on the development of the labour relations system not only in Russia, but throughout the former Soviet Union states. This conclusion applies to other states in the region because practices in labour relations are replicated by governments and employers.

Serious violations of fundamental workers' rights in Belarus after presidential elections in 2020 were a subject of consideration of the ILO. Among allegations was 'extreme violence to repress peaceful protests and strikes' (Hoffer, 2021). The ILO criticised these violations and urged the government of Belarus to take measures to respect worker's rights and freedoms.

Despite the obvious violations of the international standards, the government of Belarus rejected allegations; and this position was supported by the government of the Russian Federation (Hoffer, 2021).

Trade union strategies

Under these conditions, information campaigns around specific problems become the main strategy to protect the rights of workers and trade unions. These campaigns include collective actions of workers, taking into account existing legal restrictions. For example, in 2010, strikes at the Ford plant were declared without the legal procedure one after another: as soon as the court suspended the strike, a new strike was announced and started. As a result, the strike was not interrupted. 'Italian strikes' (work by the rules) are also used, and in extreme cases, hunger strikes.

Information campaigns are used by the KTR affiliates to address specific problems in the workplace. In particular, the campaigns are actively used by the trade union of healthcare workers 'Action' and the trade union 'Novoprof', which unites workers in the food industry, trade, services and related industries.

In serious cases, such as the arrests of trade union leaders on fake criminal charges of violations, the KTR actively uses ILO mechanisms as part of information campaigns. For example, the arrest of Valentin Urusov in 2008, and the threat of liquidation of ITUWA in 2018. The complaints on specific cases positively contributed to the solution of problems: Urusov was released early from the prison; the decision of ITUWA was overruled.

The KTR actively uses ILO mechanisms as another instrument. The KTR appeals to the ILO around systemic problems regarding freedom of association. Such complaints allow articulating them to the government and to fix the existence of the problems. Additionally, KTR uses the regular reporting system of the ILO on ratified and not ratified conventions.

KTR promotes freedom of association by the preparation of analytical reports and organizing public discussions of such reports. It advocates for the change of legislation on the right to strike at various venues, including the Russian Tripartite Commission for the Regulation of Labour Relations.

Another important strategic area of activity is support for trade unions in neighbouring countries, in particular in Belarus. In Central Asia (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and others) support is provided within the framework of the International Labour Rights Monitoring Mission. The mission was established with the aim of collecting information on workers' rights in the region; co-ordination of work with activists among workers,

human rights groups and independent trade unions; support for initiatives of groups of workers to create own organisations.

KTR pays attention to the training of trade union members and develops research and expertise in its activities in order to form alternative assessments in the social, labour and economic fields under the umbrella of the Expert Centre of the KTR.

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Section 5. Labour Without Trade Unions

Moreblessing Nyambara

Chapter 10. The informalization of labour in Zimbabwe: opening the way for authoritarianism

In 2019, a press release by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) hinted that the informal economy had the potential to initiate a renewal of the trade union movement globally (ILO 2019a). This notwithstanding that the informal sector across the world is faced with a daunting task of mobilising and establishing collective action. Such conditions are quite prevalent in developing economies across the world and Zimbabwe is not an exception. What makes the Zimbabwean case unique is that the ruling ZANU-PF party has been able to exploit such weaknesses in order to extend the life span of its authoritarian regime. In this article I stress that informalization of labour since the mid-1990s has severed the organic relationship between labour and unions, which in turn has stood to serve the authoritarian motives of the ruling party. Undemocratic governance therefore stands in the way of informal workers mobilising for a more robust trade union movement.

Globally, as of 2019, it was estimated that there were around 2.5 billion workers involved in the informal economy (ILO 2019a). While such a number of informal workers could have a significant impact influencing the trajectory of unionism at a global scale, this sector remains fragmented and unable to mobilise. Globally, the common trend is that legal regulatory frameworks and social protection for the informal sector remain non-existent or partial in relatively progressive countries. Informal workers lack job security, income security, and representation security (Schurman et al. 2012).

Informality and the Zimbabwean economy

The response by trade unions to cater for the special needs of workers in the informal sector remains tepid. Orthodox trade unionism has historically dealt more efficiently with workers who are part of registered or formal enterprises. In order to effectively cater for the informal sector, trade unions need to 'alter their internal structures, review their allocation of resources and develop new strategies in order to organize the un-organized, represent the interests of all workers, and establish coalitions with groups that share common social interests' (ILO 2019b). In the Zimbabwean case, the slow

responsiveness of trade unions has allowed the government to exploit the informal sector for largely political reasons.

All over the world, authoritarian regimes have become associated with improper governance and economic crisis. Zimbabwe has been known to fit this description with its government responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths and abductions of its citizenry as well as an economic crisis that lasted for a decade from 1998 to 2008. Massive deindustrialization, caused by a combination of neoliberal policies and misgovernance during the mid-1990s, led to an unprecedented number of unemployed citizens. Massive unemployment led to an overspill of skilled workers into the informal sector. Since then, the informal sector has become a significant pillar of the Zimbabwean economy, contributing 40% of the GDP as of 2020 (Kubatana 2021).

Challenges between informality and unionism

This notwithstanding, the informalized nature of the labour market has made it difficult for labour unions such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions to mobilize from among informal workers. Street vendors, backyard manufacturers, and small-scale miners, among many other working groups, have found themselves not meaningfully represented since independence. Especially in urban areas, informal workers have been subjected to countless episodes of abuse by council officials and law enforcement agents. In 2005, for instance, the government launched a 'clean-up' campaign dubbed Operation Murambatsvina under the guise of removing informal and illegal structures from the central business district. The justification for this campaign by the government was that the informal sector was harbouring the black market, hence the need to tear down structures of the informal sector.

However, analysts pointed out that the real motive behind this campaign was retribution for the support for the opposition party by members of the informal sector in the 2002 presidential elections (Vambe 2008). The antipathy between the state and the informal sector has thus manifested in an unwillingness by the government to provide legislation to support and protect the informal sector, which on the other hand has prolonged ZANU-PF's stay in power by depriving its opposition of a support base in the informal sector.

Ever since the mid-1990s, the relationship between trade unions such as the ZCTU and informalized workers appears inorganic. The accepted orthodox approach to unionism for a long time has been that unions represent workers in formal sectors and organizations, the main reason being that

such membership is easier to organize because of the presence of accessible employment records. Although others have argued that the ZCTU has made strides in representing informal workers, representation remains scant. The failure by organizations such as the General Agriculture and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe to cover a larger base of farmworkers and facilitate better working conditions and a minimum wage is indicative of the waning influence of unions in Zimbabwe. Workers in agriculture and mining are at the lowest ranks on the production chain and, without representation, they receive the lowest remuneration and operate in the harshest working conditions without protective clothing. In the past years, there have been an unprecedented number of deaths of small scale miners operating in unsafe working conditions, yet the government's response to their plight remains ambivalent (Mupanedemo 2020). Attempts to form cooperatives in order to protect their interests and bargain for fair better wages and better living conditions have been less successful. In most cases, cooperatives have not been on a sound footing owing much to lack of organization and external influence from political figureheads. The politicization of cooperatives has led them to become an extension of party interests instead of being independent bodies representing the interests of small-scale miners. In such scenarios party affiliates alone have stood to benefit from mechanization schemes and other forms of technical and financial support. Non-party affiliates have thus become victims of violence and intimidation forcing them out of cooperatives or forcing them to accept unacceptable prices for their produce.[1] The phenomenon of party affiliation is not only peculiar to small-scale mining but prevalent across the informal sector. Certain sections of the informal sector have continued to benefit from state patronage in exchange for votes. Therefore, on another level, the informal sector has been used to extend the authoritarian agenda of the ruling party.

The informalized nature of the labour market in Zimbabwe has created a huge gulf between labour and labour unions. Labour representative bodies have an insurmountable task reaching out to millions of informalized workers who are seldom organized in any way. In turn, the government has on occasion manipulated the informal sector to extend its authoritarian agenda by employing a delicate balance of violence and intimidation on the one hand and patronage on the other. Therefore it would seem in the best interests of the government not to pass legislation for the protection of informal workers. The major conclusion on informalization and authoritarianism drawn from the Zimbabwean case is that informalization of the working class can serve to extend the life span of authoritarian regimes by

1 See Chiwawa (1990) and Bushu (2020)

severing the organic ties between workers and labour unions, which offer a more systematic platform for airing out grievances and initiating a change in political attitudes.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the democratic space in Zimbabwe needs to be expanded. Trade unions need to expedite the process of registering informal workers and more broadly facilitate processes of regional as well as global solidarity among informal workers.

At the grassroots, informal workers may benefit from the formation of cooperatives or guilds. Such small groupings may join to form clusters from the community level up to the national level to form larger groups representing various segments of the informal sector which may be easier for trade unions to pick up.

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Chapter 11. Movement-oriented labour NGOs in China

In authoritarian China, there are no independent trade unions.[1] Unlike in democracies, China's workplace trade unions are subjected to employer manipulation, and higher-level unions are part of the state corporatist structure. Trade unions are state apparatuses that help suppress the collective organizing of workers.[2] Dysfunctional trade unions created space for the growth of labour non-governmental organizations (LNGOs), which play the critical role of supporting workers' resistance. LNGOs mostly target internal migrant workers, who have increasingly staged contentious actions. Since the 1990s, LNGOs have provided various services to workers.

Starting from 2010, during the Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabo (Hu-Wen) regime, MLNGOs - movement-oriented LNGOs - started to emerge in China. These involve themselves in workers' collective actions to promote workers' collective challenges to employers or the state by establishing common purposes and solidarities among them. Workers' resistance without the support of MLNGOs had long been characterized by legal mobilization through the mediation, arbitration, and litigation systems at an individual level, or by uncoordinated, unorganized, and spontaneous group actions at a collective level. MLNGOs were able to promote one type of 'modular collective action' among workers that was 'easily transferrable from one setting or circumstance to another' (Tarrow 2011: 41), deploying three tactics: election of worker representatives, collective negotiation with employers, and protest activities.

MLNGO-propelled modular collective action

First, MLNGOs facilitated workers in collective resistance electing extra-union representatives. This tactic helps establish leadership, mobilizing net-

1 This article draws partly on Hui, E.S. (2021) Movement-oriented labor organizations in an authoritarian regime: The case of China. *Human Relations*.

2 For more about the pro-government and pro-employer nature of China's trade unions, see Sio-ieng Hui (2011) and Sio-ieng Hui (2012)

works, and connective structures among workers, all of which are crucial for movement mobilization. This type of election fostered a culture of democracy and self-autonomy among workers, in contrast with the undemocratic milieu of Chinese trade unions. Worker representatives are responsible for negotiations with the company, for dealing with government officials, for overseeing solidarity funds, for internal communication and mobilization, and for social media publicity, among other tasks. Elected worker representatives acted as 'movement entrepreneurs' (McCarthy and Zald 1973) - cadres, leaders, or organizers - who led the workers' campaigns. Mobilizing networks and structures helped turn not-yet-committed workers into adherents who identified with the campaign's goals or into constituents who were willing to offer resources to the campaign. The intervention of MLNGOs transformed workers from discrete, unorganized entities into more organized and coherent unities with visible leadership.

The second tactic of MLNGO-propelled modular collective action is collective negotiation. The foundation of this tactic is shared ideas among workers regarding the attribution of blame, action mobilization, and solution identification. With the help of MLNGOs, workers characterized their employers' culpability, focused on building the collective power of workers, and advocated collective negotiation as a solution to labour disputes. Furthermore, MLNGOs provided workers with training and advice on collective bargaining. For instance, they arranged for people with knowledge of collective bargaining to talk to workers in collective disputes, advised workers on the division of labour in negotiation meetings, and organized mock collective bargaining for, and reviewed negotiation meetings with, worker representatives.

Third, collective negotiations were often coupled with workers' protests to compel employers to compromise. MLNGOs motivated workers to protest by equipping them with human, material, cultural, and moral resources. For instance, they provided workers with human resources by dedicating their staff to assisting workers. They also offered cultural resources by educating workers about labour laws, organizing and mobilizing skills, and collective bargaining, and by guiding workers to deliberate on their leverage over employers and to assess potential challenges to their campaigns. Migrant workers constitute an underprivileged group who lack various types of resources. They are more likely to stage contentious actions when they acquire external resources from MLNGOs that 'convince them that they can end injustices and find opportunities … to use these resources' (Tarrow 2011: 160).

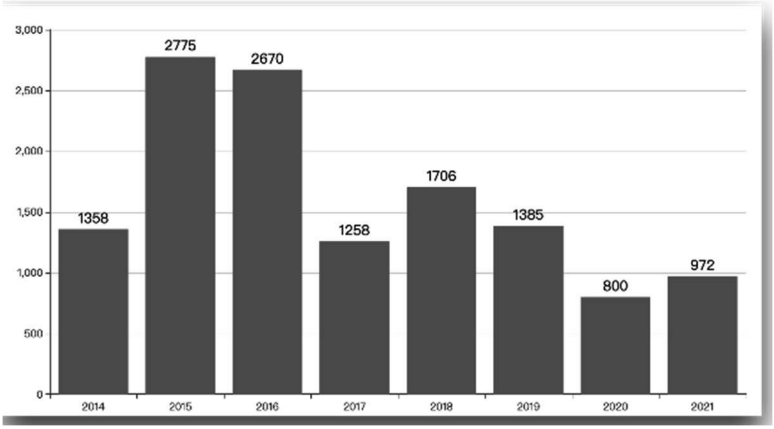
Due to their contributions to labour movements in China, MLNGOs have become the target of the government since Xi Jinping became the

president in 2013. The Xi regime has deployed several strategies to tighten control over civil society, including MLNGOs. The first is financial sapping. In 2017, the government enacted the Law on the Management of Foreign Non-Government Organizations' Activities, which stipulates that social organizations may receive financial support only from overseas NGOs which are registered in China (and therefore managed by both police and a supervisory unit from the government). MLNGOs used to receive overseas funding, but they now have difficulty obtaining financial resources, as many of their foreign donors are not registered in the country. The second control strategy used by the Xi government is welfarist incorporation, first implemented during the Hu-Wen era. The government sub-contracts services to the elderly, the disabled, youth, and more to non-profit organizations. It also sub-contracts welfare and educational services targeting workers to labour organizations that are deemed politically manageable. Since 2014, the Guangzhou government has sub-contracted public services through the venture philanthropy program (*gongyi touchuang*), spending 1.24 billion yuan on more than 800 projects by 2020. Through welfarist incorporation, the Xi administration has sought to restrict labour organizations to act apolitically rather than as labour organizers.

Third, the Xi government continues to use the official trade unions to interfere with and pre-empt independent labour activism. In 2018, the Jasic workers' endeavour to build a workplace union was severely suppressed by higher level trade unions. The party-controlled All-China Confederation of Trade Unions has incorporated workers' autonomous collective bargaining into its structures to control workplace bargaining. It has also endeavoured to co-opt labour activists. For example, one previous strike leader, after being arrested several times, was hired by the official union. Although he continued to help workers talk to employers individually, he started to promote the message that official unions will stand with workers as long as their actions are individual in nature and legal. In this way, he was discouraging workers from organizing collectively. Fourth, the Xi government has used consolidated repression to deal with uncooperative MLGOs and labour activists. In 2018, the government arrested the worker-leaders who attempted to unionize Jasic and more than 50 supporters. In 2019, four MLNGO activists and the former editor of the Collective Bargaining Forum were arrested. At the end of 2019 and in early 2020, a labour activist and two volunteers running a website to advocate for the rights of sanitation workers in Guangzhou were detained for 15 days. In September 2021, a labour activist who had supported workers with occupational diseases, together with a feminist activist, were arrested under the charge of 'inciting subversion of state power.'

Lastly, international labour groups (and other types of international entities) are often seen as 'foreign hostile forces' trying to infiltrate and create unrest in China. The Xi regime has taken measures to abort connections between international NGOs and domestic MLNGOs to weaken support to the latter. The Law on the Management of Foreign Non-Government Organizations' Activities mentioned previously does not only affect LNGOs' income, but also reduces connections and cooperation among international unions and labour groups and LNGOs in China, leaving the latter isolated. Another example is the document *Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions' Key Points for Work on Connecting with Society*, issued by Shanghai Federation of Trade Unions in 2018. The document highlights stopping 'enemy infiltration' and 'managing foreign NGOs' as the Federation's major areas of work. The Xi regime also compelled the Hong Kong government to enact the National Security Law in June 2020. This law targets collusion with foreign forces, among three other national security issues, and criminalizes actions that advocate for Hong Kong independence or call for other countries to take actions considered harmful to the city. The increasingly repressive political and legal environments in Hong Kong have compelled at least 29 trade unions to disband themselves (Reuters 2021),some of which had supported the work of MLNGOs in China.

As a result of the tightening political environment and the suppression of MLNGOs, collective labour actions seem to have decreased in China (see the graph below), dropping from 2670 cases in 2016 to 800 cases in 2020 and 972 cases in 2021. In the recent repressive period, workers in the widely reported cases were less organized, as compared to the Yue Yuen shoe-making workers strike (Reuters 2015) and Guangzhou's sanitation workers strike in 2014 (Libcom 2014) both of which had the support of MLGNOs. They did not use the strategy of election of workers' representatives and collective negotiation with employer.



Number of workers' collective actions from 2014-2021. From China Labour Bulletin.

That said, labour resistance in China has witnessed some new developments. Even without the MLNGOs support, white-collar workers and service workers have taken greater initiatives to air their grievances recently (while previously manufacturing workers were the centre of labour conflicts). For example, in Beijing a delivery worker started several WeChat groups to discuss work safety and encourage mutual assistance among delivery workers. A delivery worker in Taizhou set fire to himself to protest the harsh working conditions for delivery drivers (Su 2021). A group of food delivery workers in Weinan protested by burning their uniforms in public CLB (2021). An online campaign, Worker Lives Matter, was launched to collect information on work hours in industries such as technology and finance (Bloomberg 2021). Its aim was to protest the 996 practices, meaning workers work from 9am to 9pm for six days a week, prevalent in these industries. All these show that workers' struggles never depend on external organizations only. As long as there is exploitation, workers will continue to stage extra-union, autonomous actions to advance their rights.

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Yuri Ravavoi

Chapter 12. Labour activist in exile

This article is based on my personal work experience with other Belarusians. I am sure it will be useful to European trade unions and to those trade unionists who had to leave their country because of repression for organising workers, but are trying to help even from abroad.

I worked as a chemical production operator at Grodno Azot from 2013 to 2020. My active participation as an observer in the presidential election campaign dramatically turned my quiet life upside down. The facts I registered about election fraud and my public statements of these facts at the enterprise led me to the idea of setting up a strike committee. The strike was to free political prisoners and give us fair elections back. The regime was forced to release detained peaceful protesters because of our activity; but that made me a target for the KGB. Three days after the fabrication of a criminal case accusing me of 'Forcing to take part in a strike under threat of violence' and an attempt to detain me, I made the difficult decision to leave the country.

Since the end of August 2020, I have been a Belarusian refugee in Warsaw. With 18 months passed, I still don't feel disconnected from our people in Belarus.

The Belarusian diaspora helped me in my integration a lot; but truly my involvement remained possible because NSZZ Solidarność offered me a job in the international department as a specialist for relations with trade unions in the post-Soviet region.

I wish our fraternal trade unions in the Western destination countries for nowadays' refugees see an opportunity and a need for employing such a specialist. That trained and experienced trade unionist could have informed Western trade unions of the methods of putting pressure for trade unions working in dictatorships, and could have helped to organize and integrate refugees coming from the same country. Thus, to support a trade union leader in exile would mean to support large numbers of refugees from their country.

It will not be easy to do, because you need the person to know the language of your country and have other important competences. Another difficulty is that an initiative with an offer to work for the union from the union itself is important.

It is more likely that refugee trade unionists will look for work in a similar enterprise and unlikely that they will look for ways to continue to be active as an employee of a trade union in another country. In other words, it is important to give a helping hand. The value of such a person's experience in a trade union in a more developed country cannot be overstated. It is a very serious contribution both to the resistance to dictatorships and to the future of trade unions operating under dictatorships today.

Realising that I have a job and it is related to trade union activities allowed me in 2020, together with the Centre for Belarusian Solidarity, an NGO in Warsaw, to help many Belarusian labour movement activists forced to flee to get back on their feet. Many of them work with me as part of the Rabochy Ruch initiative to support contacts with people remaining in the country, and we are not going to give up.

Another very important area was working with representatives of the diaspora, who organised fundraising in the ByHelp and BySol campaigns to help victims of repression. We were able to do a quick verification of the appeals of the workers of those enterprises where our people were and to make sure that the aid reached the recipient transparently for all concerned (but not for the eyes of the regime).

I understand that not every trade union is able to employ trade unionists in exile. In such cases, wouldn't it be possible to support activist groups and individual activists who are willing to work with the remaining trade unionists inside the country?

The most important activities that trade unionists from various state-owned enterprises in exile can do after Russia's attack on Ukraine are aimed at ending the war. The words of one of my colleagues stuck in my mind after the violence by Belarusian state security forces in August 2020: 'There is no soap to wash away human blood.' So, no one should shed blood is our only principle. Coordination through people out of reach of the regime is badly needed in such actions.

Also, many issues in the workplace need to be highlighted, especially at this time of unprecedented worldwide sanctions against Russia and Belarus. People are being intimidated and lulled into believing that there will be enough hay in the stall for everyone. And it is all related to the war and repressions launched by the dictators. The fear of the managers of not satisfying the management above is astonishing. Unfortunately, because of the machine of repressions that has been set in motion, the unions in Belarus cannot directly point out the connection of workplace problems with the system that has been built and the politics of the dictator. Because of the lawlessness of the special services, this would clearly lead to arrest and a long jail term. This is why it is the responsibility of exiled labour

leaders and activists to highlight such issues. The field of activity is very wide - the terrible economic conditions at the enterprises, the investigation of corruption cases which it has now become fashionable to disguise as sanctions-circumvention schemes, the publicity of violations of labour and basic rights at work, methods of safe behaviour on the internet and so on.

The main thing is to carry this with the message that by holding hands we can overcome such problems of dictatorship, and moreover we can build a brighter future.

Another area of work is maintaining and creating new safe channels for communication of closed groups of activists from work collectives. There are no better moderators for state enterprise workers than exiled trade unionists who, in addition to working for the general public, can help keep closed communities safe online.

Many people can ask 'How can trade unionists from abroad ensure safe communication between the people remaining at home when criticism of the authorities is voiced in whispers between trusted people?' Actions coordinated through social networks and ordinary groups of sufficiently anonymous Telegram are partly learned lessons for the special services of the Belarusian dictator. These simple modes of communication make it possible to identify some users. By publicising these cases extensively, propaganda tries to convey that the authoritarian regime is watching everyone, although that is far from being the truth. Thanks to the work of talented Belarusian programmers we have possibilities to reduce identity revelation incidents to almost zero.

The moderation of such communities and ongoing training in safe group communication methods will scale up the number and quality of such groups. Yet we need moderators from trusted people who have fled the country. Administration of such communities through passing on knowledge of security protocols and monitoring the protocols' implementation can help organise discussion, decision-making and coordination among people inside the country.

I would like to point out that exiled activists need to remember not to call for immediate strikes. The time to accumulate resources and learn can take longer than we expect. It is hard not to be emotional when you can't get home, when Belarus has been dragged into a war against the Ukrainian people, when every day thousands of totally innocent people are in prison and repression continues in the most sophisticated forms. But it is very important for us to work without calling for immediate strikes. We know from all independent polls that there is a majority of those who want changes in Belarus, but it is important to come to the willingness of the majority to act.

The boiling point is close, because heavy economic consequences are on the way.

As a strategic plan for change in our country, I see a coordinated nationwide strike through the Rabochy Ruch platform, created through the united efforts of the workers' team from different state enterprises and Belarusian programmers. Before that we still have work to do. The mistakes of the dictators, leading to the impoverishment of the Belarusian and Russian peoples, bring us closer to changes by galloping steps.

The world has seen many times that a united force of workers is able to fundamentally change the situation and change the direction of policy. In today's context, I am convinced that it is information technology that will play an important role in organising this force, because it allows passionaries in exile to be useful to their sisters and brothers even from abroad.

Section 6. Border Crossed

Can Kaya

Chapter 13. Refugees unwelcome: EU-Turkey deal on migration

Pazarkule, Turkey-Greece border, March 2020. Photo: Murat Bay.

A masked group raided Syrian refugees' house in Istanbul. Nail Alnaif was stabbed to death while sleeping.

In Izmir, the house of Syrian workers was set on fire at midnight, and the three workers were burned to death.

A mob was organised against the Syrian neighbourhood in Ankara. Syrians' homes and workplaces were plundered.

22 migrants were beaten and pushed into the Maritsa River by Greek soldiers after their clothes were taken. 19 of them froze to death.

The refugee crisis in Turkey is getting worse with new influxes. Even though the migration wave to Turkey started much earlier, it reached a peak with the Syrian civil war in 2015 and became visible again with the Afghan

mobilisation last year. According to the UN's International Organisation for Migration, Turkey is the largest host country in the world, with more than 3.6 million refugees, mainly Syrians (McAuliffe and Triandafyllidou, 2021: 46). The number increases when we take undocumented and irregular migrants into account.

At the beginning of the crisis, Turkey adopted the Temporary Protection Regulation (TPR), allowing refugees to reside and work, rather than a refugee status in 2016. However, migrants entering the country illegally are not entitled to this protection status since they are undocumented. A small number of TPR holders have had a chance to find a formal job and make at least minimum wage, with some restrictions; for example, the job permit process must be carried out by the employer, and the number of Syrian workers cannot exceed 10% of the total number of employees in the workplace. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of undocumented migrants receive a fraction of the minimum wage and have no access to social rights, including health and education (Tören, 2018). According to the ILO, Syrian workers earn around 30% less than local workers, although they work longer hours (ILO, 2021). Turkey's migration policy created the cheapest labour market on the edge of Europe.

The fact that trade unions cannot access the informal sectors aggravates the situation further. Migrant workers are mostly out of the scope of trade unions as they are primarily employed in the informal sectors. In many cases, migrant workers are not paid for their work, they are employed illicitly, may be victims of occupational murders, and are exposed to racist violence and sexual harassment. In addition, as the government holds the threat of deportation against them, migrants facing these violations avoid organising themselves or complaining to the legal authorities.

The migrant crisis has also coincided with an economic crisis arising from the devaluation of the Turkish Lira since 2018. As poverty and the unemployment rate in the country increased, the anti-immigrant agenda of the right-wing began to draw more attention. Similar to other countries, the migration crisis split the labour class into two camps. Many people blame migrants for stealing their jobs and leading an economic crisis. It posed a challenge to trade unions to react to migrant workers' conditions since their members were divided among themselves. This sharp contrast is also a vulnerability of trade unions that the government constantly exploits.

The negotiations on migrants' lives

The mass influx of Syrian refugees in 2015 sparked one of the European Union's biggest-ever political crises. Almost one million migrants entered the EU in that year. The EU's solution to this crisis was to offer Turkey six billion euros in exchange for preventing migrants from leaving the country and taking back every irregular migrant who entered Greece. The EU-Turkey migration deal was struck in March 2016, which also foresaw reducing visa restrictions for Turkish citizens, an update to the customs union agreement and revitalising negotiations about Turkey's accession to the European Union. The deal aimed to reduce the pressure on EU borders and dissuade potential migration movements to Europe. A 2020 European Commission statement noted that number of irregular migrants arriving on Greek islands plunged 94% after the deal went into force.

By this agreement, it is accepted that Turkey is not a part of the EU but its border. Moreover, it serves to legitimate a labour hell, where millions of people make less than the minimum wage and have no access to social rights, and where even child and forced labour exist.

The six billion euros was paid to Turkey by the end of 2020. In addition, a new aid package of three billion euros was endorsed by EU countries in 2021, although the Turkish government is reluctant to make clear where this money is being spent. The EU does not hesitate to fund authoritarian regimes when it comes to its border security issues. This deal also shows that the EU politically recognises Erdogan's way of ruling the country.

The EU's readiness to pay any price to keep migrants away from its territory also creates a flaw that authoritarian regimes can exploit. For example, in Turkey, thousands of migrants were sent to towns near the Greek border in March 2020, following a government-rooted rumour that the border would open. As a result, thousands of people tried to enter Greece and faced the violence of Greek border forces. The EU's policy of outsourcing its border security to authoritarian regimes is becoming a pattern, as we saw in the clashes on the Belarus-Poland border. The Turkish government has begun exporting its inhumane methods to other authoritarian regimes to blackmail Europe. The humanity crises that occur on the EU's borders are the consequences of its migration policy allowing authoritarian regimes to instrumentalize people. It must also be noted that migrants captured by the Greek forces after they managed to pass the border were beaten and pushed into the Maritsa River after their clothes were taken during the freezing cold. The silence of the EU justifies the despicable methods used to ensure border security on both sides of the border. Therefore, it was not surprising to see the same violence in Poland last year.

A solidarity-based solution

The EU-TR migration agreement has hampered the labour movement in the country and brought nothing but misery to migrant workers in Turkey. As the European Trade Union Confederation, ETUC (2020), called for, the deal must be terminated immediately, and a new migration policy based on human rights, equal responsibility and fair distribution must be established. Migration must be recognised as a core human right, and an EU safe humanitarian corridor should be put in place. Furthermore, the EU should organise the reception of migrants, support them in applying for asylum and relocate them among the EU member states. Turkey's migrant crisis is not only Turkey's problem anymore. Such an authoritarian regime and cheap labour market will also undermine European workers' conditions. Turkey's economic growth strategy through competitive currency rates, cheap labour and non-unionised workplaces may cause a massive investment exodus from Europe, and the fear that 'migrants will steal our jobs' may come true in another way.

It is a fact that a large number of migrants have settled in Turkey in the past years. While Turkey was a transit country for people to reach Europe, it has become the final destination due to effective border control. The number of Syrian babies born in Turkey who have never seen Syria exceeds 600 000 (Akdeniz, 2021). Since migrant people have become a significant part of society, any solution must foresee not only their redistribution but also an integration process. They must benefit from education and health services equally and access the labour market under fair conditions. The Turkish government must be forced to provide stable and secure refugee status to the migrants instead of temporary protection that can be revoked at any time. The EU must take responsibility for repairing the destruction stemming from the deal. The allocation of EU funds and EU-Turkey trade agreements can be practical tools to address the situation. An adequate supervision and sanction mechanism can be initial steps against Turkish suppliers of the EU companies that use migrant labour and exploit them. Respect for the right to collective bargaining and the right to organise must be made essential for these suppliers. Further cooperation between European and Turkish trade unions may help mobilise workers in these companies.

Although the European trade unions and trade union federations developed a progressive attitude to the crisis at the beginning, their actions were eventually far below their capacity. The polarisation among members of the Turkish trade unions can be observed on their ground as well. For sure, there is no easy solution for this. However, the hesitancy in the Euro-

pean labour movement may bring more severe devastation to the continent. Unless the European trade unions take a proactive stand on this issue, a significant field in terms of labour rights will be abandoned to the extreme right's anti-migrant propaganda.

The world is not the old world anymore, but the old slogans are still shining the light on the way we need to walk. The labour movement can only find its way through this darkness with international solidarity.

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Section 7. Specific Forms of Solidarity

Khaing Zar Aung and Cecilia Brighi

Chapter 14. Will sanctions work again in Myanmar?

More than a year after the Myanmar military coup, it is time to intensify international diplomatic, political and economic actions, defeat the junta, and put the country back on the path toward democracy. It also time for like-minded countries to agree on a unitary diplomatic strategy towards both the junta and its supporters, particularly Russia and China, who are standing in the way of a binding arms embargo at the UN Security Council (Charbonneau, 2022).

February 2022 marked one year since Myanmar's armed forces took power and declared martial law in Mandalay and Yangon, both major industrial hubs producing clothes worn by many Westerners. In March, it was one year since 150 000 to 200 000 workers fled Yangon in the face of random killings, arbitrary arrests and arson attacks.

Those who ran had a hard time getting back to their villages. The military had set up checkpoints on the roads and travellers were harassed, searched and detained. Those who made it home found little safety in the backcountry. The army was attacking rural areas as well, devastating religious sites and launching airstrikes on the armed groups struggling to defend civilians. In Khatea, a village in Shan State, inhabitants were blindfolded, bound, and forced to walk in front of troops as human shields.

To escape from these crises and oppression, uprooting the military regime completely is the only way.

A human rights catastrophe

The junta has generated millions of unemployed workers and displaced people. It has also targeted trade unions, a key force in the mobilisation of the nonviolent opposition, and prohibited the freedom of assembly and association. There have been numerous incidents of trade unionists being detained, injured, or killed during protests.

The situation compelled the ILO's Governing Body to express, last June:

> profound concern over ongoing practices of the military authorities including the large-scale use of lethal violence and the use of forced labour, as well as the harassment, ongoing intimidation, arrests and detentions of trade unionists and others, including the Rohingya, for exercising their human rights, and called on the military authorities to cease immediately such activities, and to release from detention and drop any charges against trade unionists, who have peacefully participated in protest activities. (ILO 2021)

A report from the UN Human Rights Council late last year put it even more succinctly: 'The coup has evolved into a human rights catastrophe that shows no signs of abating' (UNHRC 2021).

After a year of stalemate in international action, the Burmese people asked the international community to stand up to tighten sanctions to strangle the military junta and the resources that feed it. There is no more time to waste. The people in Myanmar are starving.

Those who oppose increasing sanctions on the grounds that they will worsen the already dire humanitarian situation overlook the peculiarity of the Burmese case: sanctions have been repeatedly requested by the Myanmar political and social opposition. They would be imposed on Myanmar in accordance with our will rather than by foreign governments alone, giving them strong legitimacy. And, in the past, they have been effective. Myanmar people are already boycotting products made by military-owned companies and refusing to pay electricity bills and other taxes in order to shorten the lifespan of this dictatorship. They are ready to accept further sacrifices, including those made necessary by comprehensive economic sanctions, and believe restrictive measures must be generalised. Effective international restrictions heed the people's call

Sanctions last time

In 1997, during the last military government, the ILO published a report accusing the junta of widespread and systematic exploitation of forced labour. It drew on more than 10 000 pages of data, including interviews with victims, witnesses and trade unions, to highlight the impunity with which government officials and military officers used forced labour as a tool to intimidate and rule the country.

Spurred by the reality that was captured in the ILO's report, the Federation of Burmese Trade Unions, FTUB, and several other groups launched a campaign against the presence of multinationals in Myanmar. We want-

ed them to leave the country and take their investment with them. This campaign caused important companies such as Pepsi, Heineken, Texaco, Sony Erikkson, Reebook and Levi's to leave the country. Trade unions also filed a complaint with the European Commission (EC), and the EC agreed to suspend the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Myanmar in response to its systematic violation of human rights.

In June 2000, the ILO conference furthermore approved a resolution recommending to 'the Organization's constituents that they review their relations with Myanmar and take appropriate measures to ensure that such relations do not perpetuate or extend the system of forced or compulsory labour in that country' and invited 'the Director-General of the ILO to inform international organizations, working with the ILO, to reconsider any cooperation they may be engaged in with Myanmar and, if appropriate, to cease as soon as possible any activity that could have the effect of directly or indirectly abetting the practice of forced or compulsory labour' (ILO 2000).

Sanctions began to be adopted, but due to the time-consuming nature of government decision making, most key economic sanctions were adopted after the repression of the 2007 Zaffron revolution and the approval of the 2008 constitution. Nevertheless, through a strong mixture of sanctions, negotiation with the ILO and political pressure, the military junta passed the baton to the semi-civil government, enabling the start of a new chapter.

Today's demands are in line with that history

The choice we must make

On 7 October 2021, the EU parliament adopted a strong resolution requesting the EU council to freeze assets, block transfers to state-owned banks and place the state-owned Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise on the sanctions list. This enterprise is, according to the resolution, 'the junta's single largest foreign currency inflow.'

These decisions responded in part to the call for comprehensive economic sanctions launched by 200 civil society organisations in Myanmar. To illustrate the breadth of the coalition making this call, it included the Labour Alliance comprising 16 labour organisations, nurses' organisations, women's organisations, university student unions, teachers' unions, the Printing and Publishing Workers' Union, the Electricity Distribution Workers' Union, the Myanmar Railways Workers' Union, various medical networks and the LGBT Alliance. These groups, and many more, are all requesting comprehensive economic sanctions.

The 183 signatory organisations are aware of the concern that previous sanctions on Myanmar had negative humanitarian impacts. In response, the signatory organisations wrote:

> We understand that Comprehensive Economic Sanctions (CES) can cost millions of jobs in Myanmar and possibly further decimate the situation in the country. However, the long-term presence of the military will only worsen and prolong human rights and workers' rights violations, forced labour issues, unemployment, food shortages, refugee crisis, and other oppressions. To escape from these crises and oppression, uprooting the military regime completely is the only way. Comprehensive Economic Sanctions (CES) can destroy pillars of the military, and shorten their lifespan. Therefore, it is the choice we must make, to build a new federal democracy, that people desire.

These organisations are asking international institutions and governments, including the EU and USA, to block international financial and insurance services, paralyze airports and docks and strangle trade in arms, petrochemicals and other natural resources. To be effective, sanctions must be comprehensive and ban all commercial activities with the Myanmar regime. Combined with diplomatic action toward China, Russia, and other governments feeding the junta, it will be possible to starve the regime and drive it out. All governments should understand that only a democratically-elected government can stabilise the country and bring prosperity for all.

Governments and international organisations should listen to the Burmese voices currently calling for international sanctions. The Industrial Workers' Federation Of Myanmar, which is leading the Comprehensive Economic Sanctions campaign, had been working for a year to oppose the military coup, with strikes and demonstrations that saw workers, and particularly women, in the forefront. They deserve to be heard. And they know that sanctions will hit their country hard. But they are asking for them anyway because, when they did so in the past, their heeded calls helped topple the junta government.

Alone, though, sanctions are insufficient. To overcome the stalemate, they must be accompanied by strong diplomatic action that brings ASEAN, China, Russia, the EU and the USA to the table with the National Unity Government of Myanmar to envisage a possible way out. This must also be accompanied by a decision at the UN Security Council on an arms embargo. Only when the big decision makers join hands can the junta be defeated and the transition toward a real democracy be started once again.

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Lizaveta Merliak

Chapter 15. Reasonable forms of international solidarity: experiences from Belarus

Based on events in 2020 and 2021 in Belarus.

In the middle of August, 2020, *Global Labour Column* wrote that '…Belarus will never return to what it was before. There is no way back. If Lukashenko is able to hold on to power, he will be compelled to turn to an even more repressive rule as millions of dissidents need to be forced into obedience' (Buketov and Merliak, 2020). That was a week after the rigged presidential elections, which led to people's uprising. In those days we saw hundreds of thousands of peaceful protesters in the streets of Belarusian cities; workers of huge state owned enterprises forming strike committees; and a so-long awaited popular solidarity promising to wash the 26 year old dictatorship away.

Before elections, Belarus was a dictatorship that dared to leave some forms of dissent, like some independent media, some NGOs, some political parties, and some independent trade unions. Overall oppression of civil society seemed to prevent large protests for years. With the events that followed the elections back in August 2020 there appeared two new variables that have changed the scene dramatically. The first one was the insane violence that the state was using against peaceful protesters; and the second, the mass participation in peaceful protests that had been never seen before. The reasonable peaceful response to the state violence during the first days of protests was an urge for a general political strike coming from the united workers of the country's largest enterprises.

The state had to cease violence, confronted with the threat of a general strike. However, the looming threat became a bluff quite soon for several reasons, such as the return of the majority of workers back to work as their main goal - to stop violence - was reached; the strike committees of separate factories failed to unite quickly into a general strike committee to coordinate activities together; the employers had time to overplay the workers by playing the card of legal and illegal strike issues; but mainly the lack of experience in collective actions and traditionally high threshold of distrust to others – all this indicated to the authorities that the general strike was not going to happen. When the participation in street protests started

to decrease, the repression mechanism of the state's vertical power structure continued to function again.

With the return to repression, the authorities tried to take control over the intensity of the workers' protests. The centres of the workers' protests, such as state owned companies Belaruskali, Grodno Azot, Naftan, BMZ and a couple of automotive plants in Minsk and its region, were hit hardest.

With the first detentions of unionists in August, 2020 it was crucial to have an extraordinary powerful tool for their release. The BITU chairperson from 2011 to 2019, Mikalaj Zimin had been arrested after the polling stations closed in Soligorsk on 8 August, right in the street. Compared to others arrested, his sentence was the longest, and the conditions of detention the worst. In addition Mikalaj had a poor health condition. There was no access to information concerning him as the whole law enforcement system didn't work to rule.

Extraordinary tools to respond to arrests

The union got news from Zimin after one of his co-prisoners went free. The urgent extraordinary tool used to liberate the union leader was the intervention by the ILO General Director. It was used once again on 17 September 2021 when the chairperson of BITU Maksim Pazniakou (BITU 2021) was arrested, allegedly for reposting a song from a news channel deemed extremist by the regime. Then, the two global union federations that the union is affiliated to, namely the International Union of Foodworkers and the IndustriALL Global Union, addressed the General Director of the International Labour Organization, Guy Ryder, for urgent intervention. Fortunately, it worked again, and the union leader was released.

The other case worth mentioning is my arrest and release (IndustriALL 2021), that happened on 30 August in Grodno where I was arrested after participation in a peaceful rally. The union was immediately informed by my family, and in a very short time while I was in the police station being interrogated, a spontaneous international solidarity campaign started: international unionists called the police department and asked about my health and reasons of detention. About 200 international calls from Switzerland, Russia, Germany, UK, Japan, Netherlands, and Ghana definitely changed the attitude of the police officers towards the International Secretary of the union, and I was released.

LabourStart online solidarity campaigns

It has been a long time since the most common reaction of global unions to the bold violation of rights was a general secretary's letter sent to a company headquarters or to a minister of a country, most possibly by fax or even more traditionally, by mail. Such a single letter would have most probably appeared in a trash bin of the addressee and disseminated no information to wider (international) public.

Luckily, the progressive union movement uses the development of technologies and we have comrades who pioneered advancing the workers' rights by creating LabourStart, an online news service maintained by a global network of volunteers which aims to serve the international trade union movement by collecting and disseminating information - and by assisting unions in campaigning in other ways. Its ActNOW campaigning system was used to launch several international solidarity campaigns in support of Belarusian union and labour movement leaders and activists.

Right at the beginning of peaceful protests that involved workers and union members who were confronted by violence in August, 2020, there was a general solidarity online campaign (Belarus: Stop the violence) launched in partnership with the International Trade Union Confederation, the European Trade Union Confederation, IndustriALL Global Union, and the International Union of Food-workers at LabourStart to send a clear signal to the authorities that the global labour movement would not tolerate repressions going on in Belarus. The campaign was widespread; the news appeared in social media in many languages. It sufficiently assisted the union at critical times to keep the news updated when the internet was blocked, mass arrests were happening, and the union human resources worked to the limit.

LabourStart had launched two more campaigns for the release of Belarusian union activists and leaders that year. In September and October of 2020, activists of independent unions who were at the same time part of the strike committee at Belaruskali were most often arrested, prosecuted and jailed. When solely local forms of solidarity started to be less effective or even became a direct cause for yet another arrest of another union activist, the BITU asked IndustriALL Global Union to launch an international online campaign. Thus, LabourStart launched an online solidarity campaign (Belarus: Free union leaders and activists) for imprisoned BITU vice-chairperson Siarhei Charkasau, union activists Pavel Puchenia and Yury Korzun and a co-chairperson of the strike committee of Belaruskali, Anatol Bokun. In one week this campaign was supported by more than 6300 unionists from all over the world: emails of protest were generated and sent to

Soligorsk police and executives. It reached its goal: the four comrades were released and their terms in prison were not prolonged as had happened before.

The events in Belarus proved LabourStart union platform to be very effective in urgent interventions. Thus on 13 November 2020, the LabourStart executive board immediately launched a solidarity campaign in partnership with the BITU and International Trade Union Confederation, Belarus: Free dozens of jailed union activists. That day an excursion bus with 42 activists from Soligorsk, members of BITU and civil activists among them, went to visit historical places of Belarusian protests. Many activists who were previously arrested and sentenced to jail, were there. This time they had been arrested by the police for hanging the banned white-red-white historical flag at some point of their excursion and were taken to the local police station till court hearing.

Challenges of online campaigns

The challenge we faced during this campaign was that messages could not be delivered to the recipient. We overcame that challenge by printing out the entire list with over 7400 signatures and handing it in person to the recipient. The adaptation of official/corporate mailing systems of the whole authoritarian power vertical machine to bounce our emails was a minor challenge compared to the big one: although campaigns were fast and gaining many supporters, the leverage on the authorities was comparably weaker than we could expect. Online campaigns didn't bring immediate release of our comrades. However, in case of subsequent sentencing of activists we believe it was the campaign that restrained the authorities from extending the period of detention.

Another technical challenge that suddenly revived the 'urging letter' response of global union federations on violations of workers' rights is the two-step verification used for addressing officials (ministers, local authorities, president administration) from their websites. It is definitely worth doing to address the authorities, and to use this occasion for public statements. Same is true for state owned companies. One might think that the effect is close to zero, but we believe there is always a reaction: the state appointed CEOs report to their chief – the state.

One should keep in mind that the solidarity tools described here are not used alone, but are often part of a greater campaign involving coverage on social media and intensive interaction on union communication channels.

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Belarus: Free dozens of jailed union activists. https://www.labourstartcampaigns.net/show_campaign.cgi?c=4593

The prison in the city where the author lives, surrounded by thousands of peaceful protesters on 16 August, 2020. Photo by Katsiaryna Hardzeyeva

Ramon Certeza, Melisa Serrano and Verna Viajar

Chapter 16. Solidarity on multiple scales: repression in the Philippines

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has indeed brought change in the Philippines, but towards strongman politics and authoritarian policies. By co-opting the military and the police, Duterte has consolidated power in the executive, heavily influenced the legislature, and challenged the judicial branches of government under strongman rule (Viajar 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the authoritarian practices of Duterte's governance through harsh enforcement of Covid-19 restrictions, repression of dissent, and persecution of those critical of his policies.

Duterte's repression of critics has narrowed the freedoms and democratic spaces gained after the Marcos dictatorship, such as press freedom, respect for human rights, and expression of differing political views. A survey conducted by the Social Weather Station (SWS), released in March 2021, found that 65% of Filipinos perceived it dangerous to publish anything critical of the administration (Mercado 2021). Ironically, Duterte's populism remained high in September 2020 but followed the 'demobilized' form of populism, wherein people are restricted to participating in policy formulation and decision-making.

As Duterte thwarted long-held Filipino beliefs about solidarity, community and respect, illiberal norms regarding labour, human and women's rights and corruption of democratic institutions have been strengthened. Duterte's polarizing and heavy-handed stances and actions were expressed through the narrowing of freedoms and democratic spaces for peoples' civil, political and human rights, and the demobilization of peoples' participation in determining the future of their communities.

Labour repression under the Duterte regime

The Duterte regime has been marred by an escalation of harassment, arrests and detentions, as well as killings of trade union leaders, human rights

defenders and labour activists and organisers. Red-tagging[1] or red-baiting has been used to intimidate, silence and sow fear in activists, labour leaders, church leaders, media persons, movie entertainers and lawmakers who are critical of the Duterte government. A number of those red-tagged became victims of extra-judicial killings.

The Covid-19 pandemic was also used to further erode human rights. The 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index[2] report by Transparency International found an association between violation of civil liberties and corruption. The report cites recent cases in the Philippines:

> Since the election of Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines has also seen a sharp decline in freedom of association and freedom of expression, making it harder to speak up about corruption. In 2020, it was the country with the second highest number of murdered human rights defenders, with a total of 25 deaths. (Transparency International 2022: 10)

It is not surprising therefore that, from 2017 to 2021, the Philippines has consistently been among the ten worst countries for working people in the International Trade Union Confederation's (ITUC) Global Rights Index.

Instruments of repression

The state's military forces heightened their presence in areas considered to be major flashpoints of communist insurgency to prevent militant unions from organizing workers in factories. Trade unions strongly opposed the establishment by the Philippine National Police and the Philippines

1 Red-tagging or red-baiting has been used for decades in the Philippines in the government's campaign against the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its armed wing, New People's Army (NPA). Established in the late 1960s, the CPP-NPA played a prominent role in the resistance against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos. The NPA began guerrilla warfare in the 1970s and until 1986 against the authoritarian regime of Marcos, ambushing army troops and assassinating government officials. Currently, the CPP-NPA is considered an insurgent movement by the Armed Forces of the Philippines. For a brief overview of the growth of the communist insurgency in the Philippines, see International Crisis Group (2011).

2 The corruption perceptions index (CPI) is one of the leading global trackers of public sector corruption, drawing data from 13 public sources. At least three sources are required to provide a ranking for each of the 180 countries included. The index gives a mark out of 100, with 100 representing 'very clean' and zero representing 'highly corrupt'. Countries are ranked relative to each other.

Economic Zone Authority of the Joint Industrial Peace and Concerns Office, now called the Alliance for Industrial Peace and Program (AIPP).

Trade unions view the AIPP as an attempt to thwart union formation in ecozones. The AIPP purportedly aims to promote industrial peace, competitiveness and productivity in export processing zones, and support the Duterte administration's policy program, End Local Communist Armed Conflict. To date, AIPPs have been established in the economic and freeport zones in Pampanga, Bataan, Cavite, and Baguio, and there are plans to expand to the whole of Luzon.

The Anti-Terror Act, which was hastily passed and signed into law in July 2020 at the height of the pandemic and lockdowns, has been used to justify the arrests and detentions of labour leaders, human rights defenders and activists. Individuals and legitimate organisations which oppose government policies or pose a political threat to it may be charged as, or associated with, a terrorist group.

These instruments of repression, among others, have emboldened military forces in the country. On Human Rights Day (10 December) in 2020, six union leaders and organisers of the Kilusang Mayo Uno, a militant labour centre in the Philippines, and a journalist/editor were arrested, allegedly for illegal possession of firearms and ammunition. Trade unions decried the arrests and trumped-up charges were brought against the 'HRD7' (the name given by the labour sector to this group of workers). Increased pressure from trade unions, civil society organizations, human rights groups and church groups, both in the Philippines and abroad, resulted in the release of three of the HRD7 by the time of writing. However, on 7 March 2021, the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines mounted a deadly crackdown in Laguna, Rizal and Batangas, resulting in the deaths of nine activists and the arrest of six. This crackdown, called Bloody Sunday, is considered one of the biggest one-day offensives by the police and military against activist groups, many of which have been red-tagged by the Duterte administration (Talabong 2021). Sustained pressure from the labour sector and civil society organisations led the Department of Justice (DOJ) to investigate the killings. In mid-January 2022, the DOJ reported that the National Bureau of Investigation had filed a murder complaint against 17 policemen allegedly involved in the killings of two fisherfolk leaders in Nasugbu, Batangas (Navallo, 2022). As for the others killed, the DOJ has started preliminary investigations, albeit on an individual basis.

National and global union actions to fight repression

In response to the continued suppression of labour rights and the spate of arrests and killings of labour leaders, activists and human rights defenders, trade unions in the Philippines have initiated solidarity actions at the national and international levels, and have embarked on legal and regulatory contestations.

In 2019, the Nagkaisa labour alliance, the largest coalition of trade unions in the Philippines, banded together with the other major trade unions and participated in the Council of Global Unions (CGU) fact-finding mission in the Philippines. This mission assessed the political and trade union situation in the country in the context of the reported killing of trade union leaders, organizers, and activists. The CGU delegations came from Education International, Building and Woodworkers International, Public Services International, IndustriALL Global Union, and ITUC. The Philippine trade unions narrated actual experiences of killing of union leaders and activists, red-tagging, harassment and threats allegedly committed by military and police authorities. The CGU mission found a systematic violation of labour rights and human rights. In order to address these issues, the CGU committed to build support for an ILO high-level mission, to create a country solidarity strategy and to develop a working group that will do coordinating work on the Philippines to support trade union actions and programmes.

In 2020, major trade unions in the country came together again and drew up, with the support of the ILO Philippine Country Office and an academic[3], *Labour's Position Paper on the UN Socioeconomic and Peacebuilding Framework (UN SEPF) For Covid-19 Recovery in the Philippines (2020-2023) and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework*. The report, which was submitted to the UN Regional Coordinator, reiterated unions' demand to the Duterte government to end the harassment, arrests and killings of unionists and activists. In the report, the trade unions and other worker organizations stressed that, without peace, justice and strong institutions (Sustainable Development Goal 16), all the other SDGs will be difficult to achieve. A dialogue amongst the trade unions, the UN Regional Coordinator and the UN country team took place in June 2021, following the submission of the paper.

In the 108th Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2019, trade union delegates from the Philippines brought up the

3 The academic is one of the authors of this paper, Melisa R. Serrano.

spate of killings of labour leaders and activists when the Philippines' implementation of ILO Convention 87 was discussed during the ILO Committee on Application of Standards (CAS). This move resulted in the CAS calling on the Philippine government to accept a Tripartite High-Level Mission tasked with reviewing the steps taken to address the numerous allegations of anti-union violence and the progress made in pending investigations. The Philippine government has not yet accepted the Tripartite High-Level Mission despite repeated follow ups by ILO supervisory bodies. In its 2022 report on the application of international labour standards, the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations again urged the Philippine government to investigate and punish those behind the attacks on trade union leaders and members. The ILO Committee noted with deep concern new allegations of violence and intimidation against trade unions and unionists as described in detail by the ITUC:

> … (i) the extrajudicial killing of ten trade unionists (some of whom were mentioned in previous observations of the trade unions); (ii) at least 17 cases of arrests and detention, in particular following police dispersal of a protest and police raids on union offices and unionists' homes (November–December 2020 and March 2021), as well as additional incidents of arrests and detention since 2019; (iii) 17 cases of red-tagging, intimidation and harassment, including against leaders and members of the ACT [Alliance of Concerned Teachers], the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), the Philippines National Police Non-Uniformed Personnel Association Inc. (PNP-NUPAI) and other workers' organizations; and (iv) 12 cases of forced disaffiliation campaigns and seminars, including for public school teachers, workers at a beverage producing company and palm oil plantation workers. (ILO 2022: 291)

On the legal front, in 2020 the Nagkaisa labour alliance, the biggest coalition of trade unions in the Philippines, along with other groups, filed a petition in the supreme court assailing the constitutionality of the Anti-Terror Act. On 9 December 2021, the supreme court declared several parts of the law unconstitutional but upheld the rest of the law.

These national initiatives have been complemented by trade union actions at the global level. Through sustained pressures and representation from trade unions and human rights organizations in the European Union (EU), the European Parliament adopted a resolution on 17 February 2022 that urged the European Commission to initiate the procedure which could lead to the temporary withdrawal of the Philippines' trade perks under the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (EU GSP+) should the Philippines continue to fail to act on human rights abuses. This action followed

similar resolutions initiated in 2017 and September 2020. The EU is the Philippines' fourth largest trading partner (after China, the US and Japan), accounting for 8.4% of the country's total trade in 2020 (European Commission, n.d.).

Following its fact-finding mission to the Philippines, the CGU urged trade unions around the world to show their support for workers in the Philippines. The forms of support included writing a letter to the Duterte government and delivering it to Philippine embassies in various countries and posting pictures of workers' solidarity actions on social media. On 30 November 2020, union affiliates of the CGU in the Philippines staged a national protest called 'Global Day of Action – Jobs, Rights, Safety, Accountability in the Philippines', at the University of the Philippines.

Trade unions in the Philippines staging a national protest called 'Global Day of Action – Jobs, Rights, Safety, Accountability' at the University of the Philippines, 30 November 2020. Photo: https://www.industriall-union.org/end-repression-and-killings-of-trade-unionists-duterte-told.

Screenshot of Global Solidarity for Jobs, Rights, Safety, and Accountability in the Philippines. Photo: ITUC (2020). https://www.ituc-csi.org/global-solidarity-philippines.

On the same day, trade unions in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world also staged solidarity actions to support the demands of the Filipino trade union movement (ITUC, 2020).

Critical factors

The actions taken by trade unions in their fight against repression in the Philippines are characterized by 'complementarity of forms and spaces of solidarity' that involves not only national and global trade unions, the ILO and international trade union support organisations, but also other worker organizations, peoples' organizations, civil society groups, academics, church-based groups, and other progressive sectors. Using a multi-scalar approach, trade unions have been able to identify and make use of existing political and economic opportunity structures (such as affiliation with global unions, dialogue with the government and employers, ILO bodies, EU GSP+, national laws and regulations), and, in their absence, created new ones (such as consultations with the UN Regional Coordinator and the UN Country Team) in their fight against labour repression in the country.

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Frank Hoffer

Chapter 17. Facing authoritarian regimes[1]

From Hong Kong, Yangon, Istanbul, Moscow, Manila and Minsk, pictures of peaceful protests and civil disobedience went around the world. Unarmed young women are confronting police and the military in riot gear. People go to prison, risk their lives and die for their ideals and hopes. We are on their side. We support their protest. Governments express grave concern. Resolutions are adopted. Targeted sanctions are designed to punish dictators and their closest henchmen without hurting ordinary people and business opportunities.

However, unlike the late Soviet dictators or British imperialism in India after World War II, today's strongmen are neither impressed by the masses on the street nor by western outrage or sanctions. Protest leaders are in jail or forced into exile. Brutal repression prevails. Ethnic minorities are imprisoned in detention camps. Dissidents are murdered even abroad. The military is shooting and bombing their own people. Civilian aircraft are hijacked. Putin and Xi Ji Ping are bullying neighbouring countries and show nothing but contempt for freedom, democracy and basic human rights. The Russian dictator has now ordered his troops to bombard neighbouring Ukraine into subordination. After finishing up with freedom and democracy at home, he wants to also bring Ukrainian people into his 21st century Russo-Slavic 'prison of nations' (Lenin, 1972).

1 The article was largely written before Putin started the war against Ukraine. The outstanding international support for the Ukrainian people confirms the thesis of this article that while human rights, freedom and democracy are universal values, solidarity and support tend to be selective. The article rejects military intervention to pursue democratisation or human rights. Going to war to advance human rights and democracy in a foreign country is a contradiction in itself. However, solidarity with people taking up arms to defend their human rights and freedom against military aggression is another matter. In the post-Berlin-Wall period, the rise of authoritarianism was ignored or downplayed in favour of free trade and business opportunities. Ukraine is hopefully not only a wake-up call for reinforced military deterrence, but for a paradigm shift towards a trade and investment regime that is serious about supporting inclusive democratic societies and puts a heavy price tag on human rights violations. When war starts it creates its own escalating logic; therefor the art of policy remains to find peaceful solutions to even the most antagonistic conflict without giving up on the fundamental principles of freedom and human rights.

In the long run, dictatorial rule is unsustainable and the people will win, we hope. But repression can last for many years. Nevertheless, external regime change is, in most cases, no option. It is not only morally questionable, it does not work. People can't be bombarded into democracy. Furthermore, it carries the high risk of war and large-scale destruction and has rarely resulted in free and democratic societies.

At the end of the day, dictatorships collapse when the people rise up. It's not outside pressure and sanctions, it's also not the courageous resistance of individuals, but mass protests, strikes and rebellion of the people themselves that ultimately topple regimes. Striking workers organising themselves in independent trade unions were instrumental in regime change in many countries such as South Korea, Brazil, the Soviet Union, Poland, South Africa and Sudan. However, it greatly matters whether internal opposition forces can count on international solidarity and support during their struggle or whether they are abandoned in the name of realpolitik.

Principles without credibility cannot convince

Gone is the Western post-Berlin-Wall triumphalism. The optimism that the world would enthusiastically or from lack of alternatives, willy-nilly, embark on liberal capitalism, including democracy, freedom of expression and respect for human rights, did not materialize. The vast majority of the people in the eastern bloc had regarded the Western world of freedom, democracy and market economy as the better and also morally superior option. This was one, if not the greatest, asset of the West during the cold war. The American dream and inclusive European welfare states both strongly appealed to people suffering under the gerontocratic systems east of the iron curtain. However, when painful and reckless shock therapies resulted in peripheral integration of transforming countries into the global economy, the collapse of familiar ways of life, the devaluation of earlier life accomplishments and the scrupulous enrichment of very few, disappointment and disillusion became widespread.

Thirty years after the triumph over the Soviet Union, the West has lost a lot of its glittering image. Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib are a disgrace. The financial crisis devastated the livelihood of millions of people and the trust in the economic efficiency of the system. The election of bizarre personalities such as Berlusconi, Trump or Johnson raises doubts about contemporary democracy's ability to select qualified national leaders. Fox News led the way in turning media freedom into 21st-century right-wing agitprop (Gertz 2022). The Trump presidency, culminating in storming the

White House, showed the fragility and weakness of democratic institutions even in the USA. Orbán and Kaczynski make a mockery of the alleged common values of the EU. Vaccine nationalism trumps all talk about global solidarity during the Covid-19 crisis.

For years, human rights concerns have been abandoned in favour of business opportunities in Russia or China. It was even argued that business and economic growth would lead more or less automatically to democratization (Groitl 2021) as if the more BMWs we sell to China, the faster it becomes a democracy. Indeed, the plutocratization and the technocratic hollowing out of democratic decision making led to the admiration of and the desire for strongmen even in Western societies themselves. Both Western self-confidence in being the credible custodian of universal values and Western moral authority in the eyes of others are in tatters.

The current overwhelming unity for a strong response against Russia's onslaught against Ukraine created a Western unity reminiscent of Cold War times and rhetoric. Whether this rejuvenation will be sufficient to paper over the cracks and devastation created by decades of globalisation tailored to the desires of capital is an open question.

Still the best bet

Nevertheless, only in democratic societies can people exert pressure on governments to respect, defend and enforce human rights. Wherever trade unions, civil society organisations and human rights activists try to mobilise international solidarity in support of people facing authoritarian rulers, they call on democratic governments to stick to their self-proclaimed values as part of their foreign policy. They want them to use their leverage vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes to enforce respect for basic human and workers' rights. Being aware and critical of their own governments' often incoherent human rights policies, they nevertheless see them as allies or at least as actors who can be convinced or pushed to take a stance against human rights violations.

However, as the USA and its allies are not only defenders of human rights but also a hegemonic superpower that sees human rights advocacy as an instrument in geopolitical power play, certain double standards occur. Not surprisingly this is used by human rights violators to dismiss international criticism as part of a Western plot, and is nothing but geopolitics. In some instances, self-proclaimed anti-imperialists on the left share this reasoning and end up as defenders or apologists of the indefensible (Bilous 2022). Others, following postcolonial theory, argue against human rights missionaries and value-paternalism. And indeed, imposing any set of values

on any society from the outside is not only morally questionable, it regularly fails.

If people are peacefully living in agreement with traditional, religious or even authoritarian regimes, who are outsiders to impose their hegemonic view and tell them to change? However, that is not the case in Hong Kong, Yangon, Moscow, Beijing or Minsk. People are suppressed because they themselves are demanding basic human rights, freedom and fair elections. The issue is therefore not whether Western trade unions, NGOs or governments should pursue a crusade for Western values, but whether to support people who value freedom, democracy, respect and dignity at least as much as we do.

Human rights: universal with priority for the likeminded

In this complicated environment, international solidarity campaigns need to simultaneously provide direct support for persecuted people and demand government action against the violation of universal human rights. Being active, direct supporters and not only demanding government action is essential for the effectiveness and credibility of international solidarity campaigns. Left just to governments, human rights are too often conveniently forgotten or deprioritized. The voices of trade unions and other civil society organisations are indispensable for bringing human rights violations into the public focus and providing direct practical solidarity, especially when governments are unwilling or hesitant to do so.

Concerns about human rights violations are not independent of the political priorities of governments, the values of the campaigners, the world view and ethnicity of the victims and the place of the perpetrators on the geopolitical chessboard. International solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria was largely absent, despite them being suppressed and shot by the military after winning democratic elections. Parts of the left turn a blind eye to human rights violations in Cuba. Pinochet enjoyed US support for overthrowing a democratically elected government and killing and torturing thousands of Chileans. Margaret Thatcher expressed strong sympathy for trade unions and strikes only as long as they were in Poland. While Europe generously opens its borders for desperate refugees from Ukraine, refugees from Syria or Afghanistan still drown in the Mediterranean. Show trials in China and Russia are a cynical display of totalitarian power. However, any criticism loses moral authority when, at the same time, incarceration for 20 years without any trial or access to judicial assistance in Guantanamo meets only lukewarm protest

or resigned acceptance or the relentless persecution of Julian Assange, who disclosed evidence of possible US war crimes.

Recognizing that international solidarity is not solely motivated by the unconditional defence of universal human rights principles but also by support for the like-minded helps to explain the different reactions to human rights violations under different circumstances. International solidarity is often selective and the willingness to act varies considerably.

Furthermore, human rights themselves are constantly evolving. Human rights are global standards that are formally adopted after global deliberations, but have been and are dominantly shaped by Western views and values. Newly formulated visions and priorities of human rights are somehow imposed on those who are on the receiving rather than the shaping end of these global deliberation processes. Some deeply religious and patriarchal societies, for example, disagree with the current Western understanding of gender equity or LGTBQ+ rights. They regard them as morally wrong and even as blasphemy - a view, by the way, that was also quite widespread in the West not so long ago. Therefore international solidarity in defence of human rights is most convincing and has the most potential for success when supporting issues and needs anchored in social movements in a country, and not first and foremost the priority of those that want to help.

With the relative decline of Western economic and military power, emerging rivals are also more daring and confident to not only practice but also to advocate authoritarian models rejecting individual freedom and democracy as culturally alien to their societies. Successful modernisers such as China or Singapore and their admirers tend to frame the debate as freedom versus prosperity. Development and authoritarian rule, they argue, are preferable to democracy and hunger. To the extent that the universality of values is based on the dominance of underlying hard power, credibility becomes ever more important to maintain and defend these rules and principles.

Competing policy objectives

Government actions against human rights violations are not only selective; they are also competing with other concerns such as peace or business. A confrontational human rights strategy might have negative repercussions for the already fragile multilateral system. It might further complicate cooperation in areas where global cooperation is urgently needed. Should freedom in Hong Kong and the rights of Muslim minorities take priority over business interests or the all-important cooperation against the climate crisis in

dealing with China? Choices have to be made. China tends to respond to criticism with sanctions - something Norway realised after giving the Nobel Peace Prize to Liu Xiaobo as well as Lithuania after giving prominent diplomatic recognition to Taiwan. Knowing that China fiercely retaliates against any criticism, trade unions representing workers in export industries certainly also see the risk of damaging the business prospects of companies and jobs by being too outspoken about the repression of workers' rights in China, especially as their protests will most likely not have any immediate positive impact, but will have direct economic repercussions.

Given that geopolitical and business interests tend to prevail over human rights concerns, civil society mobilisation is indispensable to push governments, in particular in those cases when human rights concerns do not coincide with other policy priorities. The EU, for example, cannot - even in a straightforward case of reckless human rights violations such as Myanmar - get itself to withdraw the special 'Everything but Arms' trade preferences that are specifically designed to promote and strengthen human and labour rights in the receiving countries. By failing to live up to its own principals and officially stated policies in the case of Myanmar, the EU makes a mockery of its value-based trade policy.

Sanctions - the illusionary silver bullet

Economic sanctions, for understandable reasons, are frequently demanded from campaigners as well as from internal opposition forces as the ultimate non-military instrument, but they are not the panacea often hoped for. Iran - subject to one of the harshest sanctions regimes ever - is suffering, but not crumbling. Economic sanctions create hardship for the people in the targeted country and they are economically costly also for the imposing countries. They lack effectiveness, if not applied by all major trading partners, which has hardly ever been the case. Economic sanctions create economic costs for repressive regimes and can function as a warning to other countries not to go down the same route. Threatening military action or economic sanctions are instruments of deterrence to restrain and push back an aggressor. The historically unprecedented massive sanctions against Russia will show whether economic sanctions can crumble an aggressor and, for the first time in history, stop a war.

However, using sanctions to advance human rights in authoritarian regimes is another matter: not on principled grounds, but most likely as a question of effectiveness. Rarely has outside pressure motivated dictators to become democratic. No one can seriously believe that economic sanctions

will force Russia or China to respect the human rights of their citizens. Moving from economic sanctions to so-called smart sanctions that focus on the leading crooks of a regime are less costly and look good, but have yet to prove any great effectiveness. Up till now, there is no evidence that stopping dictators, oligarchs and their families from enjoying the Cote d'Azur, blocking their Swiss bank accounts or excluding their children from elite universities has had any major impact.

What needs to and can be done

The limited possibilities to change dictatorial regimes must not lead to cynical realpolitik that just ignores the way regimes treat their citizens. The issue of human rights violations has to be raised bilaterally and in the multilateral system. Silence about human rights violations is complicity. Constant vigilance from civil society organisations is required against government indifference to human rights. Governments and businesses must feel the public heat in order not to conveniently ignore human rights violations.

Providing political, moral and financial support to the courageous people fighting dictatorial regimes is indispensable. Those standing up against dictatorial regimes need visible international, moral and political support as well as financial help – open and transparent where possible, clandestine where necessary. Solidarity must be firm without being prescriptive and, at the same time, careful not to raise false expectations about the possibilities and limits of international support. Assistance must also be aware of the potentially corrupting role financial aid can play.

Prioritizing economic cooperation with countries striving to respect human rights and democratic principles must be part and parcel of governments' foreign trade policies. Long term economic ties and cooperation need to support those countries committed to internationally recognised human rights including labour rights. Picking the right partner is more credible and sustainable than trying or merely pretending to make a difference through ad-hoc punishment of human rights violators. Instead of subscribing to an amoral concept of free trade and business opportunities, those sharing the values of human rights, freedom and democracy must be the privileged beneficiaries of development aid and have privileged market access. Only countries meeting these basic criteria should benefit from state credits or state guarantees for private investment. Human rights criteria must be obligatory for public procurement. There need to be penalty taxes or even a ban on imports from countries competing to oppress their people.

The elites of dictatorial regimes must be deprived of the opportunity to hide their wealth in the Virgin Islands and similar places. The corrupt global financial industry that serves the rich to stash their billions must be dried up.

Whoever is at risk in her or his home country must have easy access to political asylum in the free world. Furthermore, offering skilled people from these countries free entry to democratic societies would not only allow people to vote with their feet but would be a very effective alternative to economic sanctions. Historically, nothing undermined the repressive regime in East Germany more than the willingness of West Germany to immediately give every East German crossing the border West German citizenship. For ageing Europe to open their borders to skilled people from Russia, Belarus or Hong Kong might be, even for purely egoistic reasons, a smart migration policy. Of course, brain drain, in general, is highly problematic, but as an instrument to undercut the socio-economic base of repressive regimes, it has some advantages compared to economic sanctions that try to weaken regimes by generating economic hardship.

Finally, the most powerful way to undermine and change repressive regimes is being the better alternative. Nothing succeeds like success. Being a promising model of modern society by delivering on its own promises of *liberté*, *égalité* and *fraternité* is the most powerful challenge of democratic societies against repressive regimes. On the other hand, all talk about democracy and human rights becomes shallow if Western democracies themselves degenerate into plutocratic regimes governed by reckless political clowns. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the outside pressure to be the better alternative disappeared and a rawer form of capitalism reappeared. The deterioration of democratic standards, the rise of extreme inequality, the inability to control financial markets, the decline of social cohesion, the incapability of dealing with the global migration crisis to name just a few, allow dictatorships to claim that the west is no better or even worse than their regimes of orderly repression. Further deterioration of the West serves them well.

The 'relief' of many commentators that, by firmly supporting Ukraine, the West has regained its common values and a renewed sense of purpose (McTague 2022) will be short-lived without fundamental policy changes beyond increasing defence expenditure. Fostering universal values globally is impossible without being serious about them at home. The one can't be done without the other.

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