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Global Framework Agreements and union networking: Quo vadis?

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Global Workers' Rights: Patterns of Exclusion, Possibilities for Change

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Academic interest in Global Framework Agreements (GFAs) has grown considerably over the past several years, but the focus has largely been limited to comparing their various clauses and provisions. More recent research has centred on case studies of their implementation. In this paper we move beyond an exclusive analysis of GFAs to a broader conceptualization of steps toward transnationalizing labour relations, in which GFAs are fundamental. A GFA creates an arena for the pursuit of global labour relations by defining the content, selecting the actors, delineating the processes and setting the boundaries of labour-management interaction. As a political space undergoing institutionalization, all of these dimensions of arenas are still contested. Although the structural boundaries are fuzzy at the periphery, such arenas reach beyond the organizational entities of the signatory Transnational Corporation (TNC) to encompass the global production network (GPN). Furthermore, we show how Global Union Federations (GUFs) and their member unions operating in regard to particular GPNs have begun building Transnational Union Networks (TUNs). Using two most different case studies, we argue that structural contingencies and strategic choices intertwine to bring about divergent TUN trajectories: one favouring a limited company-specific internal approach, the other a broader, GUF-led union-building approach. Because these developments are still "work in progress" for the unions, our conclusions are limited to hypotheses in support of further research.