Donna McGuire

Re-Framing Trade
Union Mobilisation against the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)

Given the substantial and increasing encroachment of trade agreements into almost every aspect of economic and social life, there is a pressing need for research that provides a more coherent framework for understanding the source and effectiveness of organised labour’s power and capacity to influence international trade policy.

Taking the union protests against the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) as a case study, this research uses core concepts derived from social movement theory to analyse the opportunities that existed for unions to influence these trade negotiations and their capacity to identify and take advantage of such opportunities. Importantly, it adds a power analysis designed to reveal the sources of power that unions draw on to take action.

The research demonstrates that even where unions faced considerable constraints they were able to re-frame trade issues in a way that built broad support for their position and to utilise opportunities in the trade negotiation process to mobilise resistance against the GATS and further liberalisation of services.

The theoretical framework developed for the research provides conceptual tools that can be developed for improving strategic campaign planning and for analytical assessment of past campaigns.

The theoretical framework developed for this research has potential for further application as an analytical and strategic planning tool for unions.

Key words: Union renewal, campaigns, power, social movement theory, political opportunity structure, resource mobilisation, framing, free trade agreements, GATS

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Food prices have gone up to prohibitive levels for many of the world’s poor. The vast majority of those who are hungry in the world today are working in agriculture, either as small landholders or as waged agricultural workers. The majority of the food producers have not benefited from rising prices. Apparently, the bargaining power of many producers, just as that of the end consumers, has been weakened vis-à-vis the buyers and retailers of agricultural produce. This powerlessness is also in the face of governments that fail to provide an appropriate infrastructure for smallholders and social protection.

The first part of the book provides an introduction to the immediate and structural causes of the food crisis. The second part contains contributions that not only highlight the plight of rural labour but also develop tools for measuring the decent work deficit. The last part emphasizes income security as a major precondition for food security. It looks at the experiences of Brazil and India with the extension of social protection for the poor.

**Key words:** Food crisis, food security, decent work, rural labour, smallholders, social protection, Africa, Brazil, India, Indonesia