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### Transnationalism as a Social Movement Strategy: Institutions, Actors and International Labor Standards

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# Transnationalism as a Social Movement Strategy: Institutions, Actors and International Labor Standards

#### Ruben J. Garcia\*

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Assistant Professor of Law, California Western School of Law. I would like to thank the Editors of the UC Davis Journal of International Law & Policy for producing this issue and presenting their 2003 Symposium, "Workers and International Economic Organizations in the Global Economy: Challenges and Possibilities in a Global Economy," which I was happy to participate in as a Visiting Professor at UC Davis School of Law during the 2002-2003 academic year. Thanks to Dean Rex Perschbacher and the rest of the UC Davis faculty for their support of the Symposium, and support of my research and teaching while I visited at Davis. I owe great debts of gratitude to Davis professors Bill Hing, Cruz Reynoso, Jim Smith, and Associate Dean Kevin Johnson, not only for their participation in this Symposium but for countless other conversations and teachings about workers and the global economy. My wife Tori also provides a constant source of intellectual stimulation and inspiration. Finally, I thank all the students in my Labor and the Global Economy seminar at Davis for their hard work and interest in this topic, and especially for all the hard work that Yu Kanosue, UC Davis Law School Class of 2004, put into the seminar and into this Symposium.

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## I. THE TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGE TO ESTABLISHED PARADIGMS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

This year we celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>1</sup> This decision was the culmination of many years of social movement activity toward the goal of racial equality.<sup>2</sup> While many have sincerely asked whether adequate progress has been made in race relations and material equality between the races, few would deny that *Brown* continues to be a benchmark for measuring that progress. Social movement theories have long explored how and why people come together to achieve social goals, such as in the civil rights movement. Social movement theory analyzes the "political opportunities" under which actors can influence the structure and ideological dispositions of institutions.<sup>3</sup>

In the dynamic context of an increasingly global economy, social movement theory has undergone a paradigm shift in recent decades. Conceived primarily to account for the emergent progressive movements of the 1960s, social movement theorists identified the conditions that led to political and social advancements for racial minorities, women, and the environment. Sociologists such as Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly employed the concept of frames and political moments as strategies and explanations for social change. Frames provide a way

<sup>1 347</sup> U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-1963 (1989); Richard Kluger, Simple Justice (1977); Mark Tushnet, The NAACP's Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education (1987). But see Detrick Bell, Dissenting Opinion, in What Brown v. Board of Education Should Have Said: The Nation's Top Legal Experts Rewrite America's Landmark Civil Rights Decision 185 (2001).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Doug McAdam, Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, and Future Directions, in Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings 24 (Doug McAdam et al. eds., 1996).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See generally Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics (2d ed. 1998), Doug McAdam et al., The Dynamics of Contention (2001); Charles Tilly, Stories, Identities and Political Change (2003), Dan Clawson, The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements (2003).

to look at an issue that is intended to broaden the number of people who support the goals of a social movement.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, political moments are watershed events that define progress for a social movement. These concepts have been used to win over the necessary constituencies, including the courts. In addition, social movement theory identifies the conditions in which pressure on the legislature, the executive branch, or the courts would be most fruitful to the movement. The challenges of applying theories regarding the usefulness of court actions to a global political reality are just beginning to be appreciated.

Like scholars in other fields of thought, social movement theorists have had to fashion an increasingly global outlook. While the civil rights struggles of the 1960s are a fading memory for younger generations, global justice campaigns exploded on college campuses in the 1990s, reaching their apex with the "Battle in Seattle" protests of the World Trade Organization's Ministerial in 1999. Sit-in tactics, previously used so effectively to desegregate lunch counters in the South, were used on college campuses throughout the nation to prevent lucrative apparel franchises from using sweatshop or slave labor overseas in the production of goods emblazoned with college logos. High-profile manufacturers such as Nike, Kathie Lee Gifford, and The Gap were the targets of massive boycott campaigns for failing to stop their contractors from falling below internationally recognized labor standards.

These new global campaigns necessitate new forms of collective organization that, unlike the movements of the 1960s, transcend national borders, as well as cultural and linguistic obstacles. With this new world order, the traditional tools of social movement theory must adapt to the new reality. Theories relying on "framing" analysis and court actions to achieve social change must reckon with the fact that previous theories might not be immediately applicable to the new social movements. For example, how are social movement frames developed internationally? It is a challenge to convince Americans that they should care about global

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> An example of framing might be the gay rights movement employing an "equality" frame to argue for equal treatment with respect to marriage. See William N. Eskridge, Jr., Channelling: Identity-Based Movements and Public Law, 150 U. PA. L. Rev. 419 (2001) (criticizing the gap between legal scholars and social scientists who study social movements). A political moment might be a Supreme Court decision, such as Roe v. Wade in the reproductive rights movement, by which progress in the movement is measured.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Margaret Keck & Kathryn Sikknik, Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics (1999); Margaret Keck & Kathryn Sikknik, Historical Precursors to Modern Social Movements and Networks, in Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power and the Transnational Sphere 35 (John A. Guidry et al. eds., 2001); Peter Evans, Fighting Marginalization with Transnational Networks: Counter-Hegemonic Globalization, 29 Contemp. Soc. 230-41 (2000).

factory conditions, given that few people actually have an opportunity to witness labor conditions in overseas factories firsthand and establish connections with the workers who inhabit them. Social movement theories must account for why and how divergent actors such as college students, labor unions, and Indonesian factory workers might come together on non-culturally-imperialistic and non-protectionist terms.

In addition, the traditional route of utilizing the courts to raise consciousness and make social gains is complicated by jurisdictional boundaries and international comity principles. And without a formal "world legislature," activists focused their attention on new "private" structures like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Bank, which are not directly accountable to the voting public.

While globalization is a relatively recent phenomenon in academic discourse, the movement of workers and capital across borders has long tested notions of transcendent labor rights. The movement of slaves across oceans and borders occurred long before the International Labour Organization first prohibited forced or compulsory labor in 1930.<sup>7</sup> The United States dealt with the question of how to regulate national labor standards within a federal system well before the countries in the European Union (EU) began dealing with the issue of EU-wide directives and national variations. The strategies for confronting these age-old problems has been consistently evolving and changing. In just one example, organized labor shattered traditional assumptions about labor union and immigrant worker interests in late 1999 by reversing its decades-long policy against increased immigration, and instead proposed amnesty for undocumented workers living in the United States. Labor unions also reached out to exploited workers in other countries through new transnational alliances, even while they continued to argue against free trade pacts devoid of labor protections.

In the context of changing global realities, the *UC Davis Journal of International Law & Policy* ("JILP") held its March 2003 Symposium, "Workers and International Economic Institutions: Challenges and Possibilities in a Global Economy." The conference attracted a diverse array of academics, policymakers, and community activists. The participants examined the problems and possibilities that government, business, and nonprofits present for creating and maintaining labor standards in the global economy. In Part II of this introduction, I will place each of the Symposium contributions into a framework of the choices that institutions and actors must make in deciding the best course for raising international labor standards—the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, transnational labor movements, coalitions across

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> International Labour Organization, Fundamental Rights at Work and International Labour Standards (2003).

wealth and interest, and forums for asserting workers' rights. In Part III, I will conclude by discussing the prospects for new forums and issues in the global economy by addressing the question of how global labor norms might be enforced, and by considering the near-future prospects for a *Brown v. Board of Education* for international labor rights. As the contributions to the Symposium demonstrate, the challenge facing the movement toward international labor standards is to avoid being painted into a corner as "anti-globalization" forces, and searching for a more fair approach to what some see as the inevitable process of globalization.

#### II. THE SYMPOSIUM: SCHOLARS, ACTIVISTS, AND POLICYMAKERS

The contributors to this issue of JILP represent the broad spectrum of strategies that activists are employing to level the playing field of international labor standards. From working with international institutions such as the WTO to bilateral trade agreements to coalition-building between different interest groups, the participants explore a variety of strategies for humanizing the global economy. Each contribution to the Symposium represents the need and possibility for raising global labor standards using different mechanisms.

# A. The Executive Branch Path: Waiting for the Political Winds to Blow

Sandra Polaski of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace outlines the benefits of trade agreements with minimum levels of trade protection in Protecting Labor Rights through Trade Agreements: An Analytical Guide. Polaski outlines the recent successes in making labor protections an element in bilateral trade agreements, such as the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement and the U.S.-Chile Free Trade Agreement. Polaski provides a model for future negotiations as the U.S. continues to move toward regional and hemispheric trade agreements. In November 2003, leaders gathered in Miami to discuss the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), where the major stumbling blocks were not labor protections per se, but the growing divide between rich and poor countries, and particularly the subsidies given to agriculture in developed countries like the United States. Meanwhile, social movement activists gathered outside to voice their opposition to the trade agreement itself. Polaski's essay speaks to those activists with concrete steps that can be taken to make free trade agreements fairer to the workers affected by them. Developing consensus between activists

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Sandra Polaski, Protecting Labor Rights Through Trade Agreements: An Analytical Guide, 10 U.C. Davis J. Int'l L. & Pol'y 13 (2003).

and trade negotiators is a difficult endeavor, but Polaski's essay crafts a space where their discourse might begin.

#### B. Legislation: Domestic Solutions in a Globalized Textile Market

In Strategies for Garment Worker Empowerment in the Global Economy, Katie Quan looks at the challenges facing garment workers in the global economy with the end of the Multifiber Agreement in 2005. The expiration of this agreement will mean the end of many of the export quotas that keep some garment manufacturing jobs in the United States. Before the Agreement expires, however, other incentives for offshore production already have propelled many companies to leave areas in the southern United States to which they had previously moved in search of cheaper labor. Thus, as Quan argues, the garment workers' movement has already had to fashion a broader global vision of organizing in response to the mobility of capital. The old model, she writes, is based on local "organizing and collective bargaining." The new model, she argues, must focus on global organizing and global social movements.

#### C. International Dissonance on the Question: What is a Labor Union?

The labor movement is struggling with the difficulties of global organizing in other manufacturing industries, as Stephen Diamond asserts in his examination of *China's Challenge to the Global Economy*. The social movement theories about framing and strategy are put to the test by the authoritarian nature of the Chinese labor movement. The American labor movement is not only challenged by the trend of American companies moving to China, it also faces varying degrees of internal democracy within labor movements around the globe, making transnational alliances difficult.

Despite the end of the Cold War, the question of whether the AFL-CIO should "constructively engage" the Chinese government-controlled trade unions remains an unresolved issue.<sup>13</sup> Lessons can be learned from transnational labor strategies arising out of the North American Free

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Katie Quan, Strategies for Garment Worker Empowerment in the Global Economy, 10 U.C. DAVIS J. INT'L L. & POL'Y 27 (2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Nate DeGraff, Textile Leaders Lament Losses, The Times-News (Burlington, N.C.) Jan. 16, 2004 at (available at http:///www.thetimesnews.com (last visited Feb. 23, 2004) Peralte C. Paul, WestPoint Stevens to Shutter Factories in Three States, Atlanta J. Const., Jan. 10, 2004, at 1F.

<sup>11</sup> Quan, supra note 9, at 34.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen F. Diamond, China's Challenge to the Global Economy, 10 U.C. DAVIS J. INT'L L. & POL'Y 39 (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Compare Kent Wong & Elaine Bernard, Labor's Mistaken Anti-China Campaign, New Lab. F. 19 (Fall/Winter 2000) with Mark Levinson & Thea Lee, Why Labor Made the Right Decision, New Lab. F. 24 (Fall/Winter 2000).

Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The exigencies of increased competition motivated American labor unions to cooperate with Mexican government-affiliated unions such as the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (Confederation of Mexican Workers), as well as independent labor unions such as the Frente Auténtico del Trabajo (Authentic Labor Front). The inroads that American labor unions have made with labor unions in Mexico could help serve as a model for transnational labor cooperation with China.<sup>14</sup> However, such efforts must take into account the unique characteristics of China, such as the distance from North America, cultural differences, and different governmental structures. These challenges are heightened by the AFL-CIO's recent efforts under the Trade Act of 1974 to obtain trade sanctions against China for violating workers' rights.<sup>15</sup>

#### D. Coalitions and Compromises

Compromises are not new in the global economy. One of the most difficult issues for social movement activists to confront has been the perception that activists in more developed countries are actually partners in a neo-imperialist plot to keep the least developed countries poor. The need for coalitions between more- and less-developed countries on both labor and environmental problems is explored in Professor Frank Emmert's article *Labor, Environmental Standards and World Trade Law*. In this article, Emmert proposes a compromise solution that would combine fair treatment of developing and developed countries with high standards for the protection of labor and the environment. The conflicts at the FTAA meeting in Miami in November 2003 and the continued disparities between rich and poor nations make the challenge of coalition-building more difficult. Professor Emmert provides a road map for coalition-building.

# E. Amid the Debate: Strategies to Help Workers Caught in the Margins

In the discussions of which strategies will best raise labor standards, the immediate needs of workers in the global economy are sometimes lost. Ivy Lee and Mie Lewis, in their article *Human Trafficking from a Legal Advocate's Perspective*," refocus attention on workers by examining legal strategies and grassroots efforts to protect victims of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Terry Davis, Cross Border Organizing Comes Home: UE and FAT in Mexico and Milwaukee, LAB. RES. REV. 23-29 (Spring/Summer 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Steven Greenhouse & Elizabeth Becker, A.F.L.-C.I.O. To Press Bush For Penalties Against China, N.Y. TIMES, Mar. 16, 2004, at C1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Frank Emmert, Labor, Environmental Standards and World Trade Law, 10 U.C. DAVIS INT'L L. & POL'Y 75 (2003).

human trafficking.<sup>17</sup> The problem of human trafficking has only increased because of the border enforcement since September 11, 2001 (9/11). The increased attention of U.S. authorities on noncitizens in the post-9/11 world means that advocates must ensure that trafficked persons are seen as the victims and not as potential terrorists. The post-9/11 climate of fear has also meant an even more precarious situation for foreign workers in the United States. In March 2002, the Supreme Court decided the landmark case of Hoffman Plastic Compounds, Inc. v. NLRB, 535 U.S. 137 (2002). The Court held that undocumented workers fired in retaliation for union organizing could not obtain back pay and wages they would have earned if not for the illegal firing because of the imperative of border control.<sup>18</sup> The Hoffman Plastic case shows the lack of enforceability of international labor standards within our own borders, despite our decades-old statutory system for enforcing labor rights. The recent findings by the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that the Hoffman decision may be out of step with international law highlights the need, colloquially, to "get our own house in order" while seeking to dictate international labor standards in other countries.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ivy C. Lee & Mie Lewis, Human Trafficking from a Legal Advocate's Perspective: History, Legal Framework and Current Anti-Trafficking Efforts, 10 U.C. DAVIS INT'L L. & POL'Y 169 (2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, 8 U.S.C. §§ 1324a, 1324b. See also Ruben J. Garcia, Ghost Workers in an Interconnected World: Going Beyond the Dichotomies of Domestic Immigration and Labor Laws, 36 U. MICH. J. L. REFORM 737 (2003) (discussing the Hoffman case as an example of the false dichotomy between immigration and labor law).

<sup>19</sup> International Labor Organization, ILO Governing Body Establishes Commission of Inquiry to Examine Violations of Trade Union Rights in Belarus: Latest Report of ILO Committee on Freedom of Association Cites Belarus, Cuba, Zimbabwe, Others, Nov. 20, 2003 (press release available at http://www.ilo.org/public/ english/bureau/inf/pr/2003/48.htm, last visited Mar. 16, 2003) (the Committee invited the U.S. to "explore all possible solutions, including amending its legislation, in full consultation with social partners concerned, to ensure effective protection for all workers against acts of anti-union discrimination"); AFL-CIO Complaint Filed with International Labor Organization, Daily Lab. Report (BNA), Nov. 12, 2002, at E36; The Week in Mexico, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIB., Sept. 28, 2003, at A28 (discussing the Inter-American Court's ruling regarding the Hoffman case); Sarah Cleveland, Beth Lyon & Rebeeca Smith, Inter-American Court of Human Rights Amicus Curiae Brief: The United States Violates International Law When Labor Law Remedies Are Restricted Based on Workers' Migrant Status, 1 SEA. J. OF SOC. JUST. 795 (2003). On February 12, 2004, Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) introduced Senate Bill 2088, the Civil Rights Act of 2004, that would, in part, amend the National Labor Relations Act to provide the same remedies to undocumented workers which are available to authorized workers. See Newly Introduced Legislation, 81 No. 10 INTERPRETER RELEASES, Mar. 8, 2004, at 319, 321.

## III. Conclusion: New Strategies for Enforcing International Workers' Rights

The authors in this Symposium have proposed various strategies for enforcing workers rights. Litigation is yet another tool that could further the recommendations made by the authors in this volume.<sup>20</sup> There is some controversy over using litigation as a method to achieve change in domestically focused social movements.<sup>21</sup> Much of the debate centers around large public-impact cases such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). and *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973). Perhaps some of the large-impact cases addressing international labor rights and standards may yet turn into the international labor movement's *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>22</sup>

Doe v. Unocal, currently pending in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, might be the case that establishes the enforceability of international labor norms against multinational corporations. In this case, Burmese villagers seek to hold Unocal Corporation accountable for its complicity in the Burma/Myanmar government's campaign of forced labor and torture in the construction of an oil pipeline. The villagers brought suit in the federal court in Los Angeles under the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA), which allows suit by aliens for torts "committed in violation of the law of nations or a treaty of the United States."23 In this case, the Unocal Corporation's liability is premised on the theory that the corporation is jointly liable with the Burmese/Myanmar government for acts of forced labor, murder, rape and torture. After prolonged litigation in the District Court, Unocal obtained summary judgment in its favor, arguing that it could not be liable to the plaintiffs under a joint liability theory. A three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit reversed, holding that the corporation could be liable under the aiding and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> See Harold Hongju Koh, Transnational Public Law Litigation, 100 YALE L.J. 2347 (1991) (discussing ATCA as an example of a global public law litigation model); John. G. Dale, Transnational Legal Space: Corporations, States and the Free Burma Movement (2003) (unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Davis) (on file with author) (discussing the uses of legal strategies including ATCA litigation, corporate charter revocation campaigns, and selective purchasing legislation as part of the Free Burma movement strategy).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Gerald Rosenberg, The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change? (1991).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> 28 U.S.C. § 1350. The complete text of the statute reads as follows: "The district courts shall have original jurisdiction of any civil action by an alien for a tort only, committed in violation of the law of nations or a treaty of the United States." See William Aceves, Litigating Human Rights Claims in U.S. Courts: Affirming Justice and the Rule of Law, 60 Guild Prac. 129 (2003); Terry Collingsworth, Separating Fact from Fiction in the Debate Over Application of the Alien Tort Claims to Violations of Human Rights by Corporations, 37 U.S.F. L. Rev. 536 (2003).

abetting principles of international criminal conduct, and the case is currently on review en banc.<sup>24</sup>

As a federal statute, the ATCA's reach could be scaled back by the judiciary or Congress. Further, the statute by its terms applies only to aliens, and only those aliens who have the ability to maintain a lawsuit. Finally, ILO convention numbers 87 and 98—protecting the freedom of association and the right to organize and bargain collectively—are not vet considered part of fundamental international law and thus not enforceable under the ATCA against private parties.25 Thus, it is unlikely that the ATCA litigation currently pending will serve as defining moments for the international rights to associate and to bargain collectively. Nevertheless, it will continue to be an important element in the discourse of multinational corporations' accountability for human rights violations committed in foreign lands.<sup>26</sup> In short, the international labor movement may still be far from a "political moment" case like Brown v. Board of Education, but attempts to broaden the scope of the ATCA statute will continue dialogue about labor standards that transcend national boundaries. Theories about the propriety of court action as part of a social movement strategy also will have to take into account an expanded definition of "court" in the international arena, which would include proceedings under the trade agreements, the ILO, and regional human rights courts.27

The spatial dimensions of international labor standards must be emphasized. Workers move across borders and spaces from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Doe v. Unocal Corp, 2002 WL 31063976, currently pending in the Ninth Circuit, was argued on June 17, 2003 and ordered withdrawn from submission pending issuance of the Supreme Court's decision in *Sosa v. Alvarez-Machain*, 124 S.Ct. 807 (U.S. 2003). *Sosa* was argued in the U.S. Supreme Court on March 30, 2004, and will do much to determine the contours of the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA), though it does not directly present the issue of application of the ATCA to corporate violations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> See Aceves, supra note 20, at 141-42. See generally, Lance Compa, Workers' Freedom of Association in the United States, in Workers Rights as Human Rights 23, 28-29 (James A. Gross ed., 2003); Beth Stephens & Michael Ratner, International Human Rights Litigation in U.S. Courts (1996); Ralph G. Steinhardt & Anthony D'Amato, The Alien Tort Claims Act: An Analytical Anthology (1999).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Pending cases include an ATCA complaint against Coca-Cola for its alleged complicity with the systematic murder of trade union officials. These cases, though directly raising the issue of the violation of *jus cogens* norms such as murder and kidnapping, may indirectly incorporate violations of the freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining as part of fundamental international law. *See* Aceves, supra note 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> See e.g., Human Rights, Labor Rights and International Trade (Lance A. Compa & Stephen F. Diamond eds., 1996); Workers' Rights as Human Rights (James A. Gross, eds. 2003); Kimberly Ann Elliott & Richard B. Freeman, Can Labor Standards Improve Under Globalization? (2003).

developing to the developed world, just as capital moves in the opposite direction. Requiring compliance with minimum labor standards in this country and internationally, will help level the playing field of competition and create a more just global economy for workers. This issue of JILP raises several spaces and opportunities for establishing minimum standards, whether through trade agreements, cross-national coalitions or court actions. Ultimately, social movement actors must get their message across to consumers and businesspeople alike. The actors within the developing transnational labor movement can use the tools developed in this issue of JILP to frame the issues and foster development and enforcement of these norms. This issue of JILP thus provides another step toward consensus in the movement toward enforceable international labor standards.