



Workers, Unions, and Global Capitalism: Lessons from India

Rohini Hensman

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While it's easy to blame globalization for shrinking job opportunities, dangerous declines in labor standards, and a host of related discontents, the world's "flattening" has also created unprecedented opportunities for worker organization. By expanding employment in developing countries, especially for women, globalization has formed a basis for stronger workers' rights, even in remote sites of production.

Using India's labor movement as a richly representative model, Rohini Hensman charts the successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses, of the struggle for workers' rights and organization. As Indian products gain wider acceptance in global markets, disparities in pay, employment conditions, and union rights between regions such as the European Union and countries such as India are exposed, raising the issue of globalization's implications for labor. This study examines the unique pattern of "employees' unionism" that emerged in Bombay in the 1950s before considering union responses to recent developments, especially the drive to form a national federation of independent unions. A key issue is how far unions can resist protectionist impulses and press for stronger global standards, along with the mechanisms to enforce them. After thoroughly unpacking this example, Hensman zooms out to trace the parameters of a global labor agenda, calling for a revival of trade unionism, the elimination of informal labor, and reductions in military spending to favor funding for comprehensive welfare and social security systems.

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