

Global Labour Journal: Editors' Introduction

Rina Agarwala, Johns Hopkins University, USA
Jenny Chan, University of Oxford, United Kingdom
Alexander Gallas, University of Kassel, Germany
Ben Scully, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

The *Global Labour Journal* (GLJ) was launched five years ago as an outlet for multi-disciplinary research on labour and labour movements around the world. Specifically, it aimed to understand the contemporary challenges global labour faces and the potential transition of the various labour movements around the world to a new form of global unionism. In the years since its founding, GLJ has published a diverse range of cutting-edge research on burgeoning forms of 'new' labour activism (from alternative unions to new social movements) in the global North and South, on the prospects of revitalising 'traditional' trade unionism, on the effects of outsourcing and subcontracting on labour, and on the divisions between informal and formal sector workers, employing varying units of analysis (from single case studies, to cross-national comparative studies, to global studies). GLJ has also hosted lively and much-quoted scholarly debates and showcased new books. In short, the journal has played an instrumental role in defining, expanding and enriching a new field of Global Labour Studies in the era of neoliberalism. The success of the journal is owed to the vision, energy and dedication of the founding editors, Edward Webster and Robert O'Brien, as well as the tireless work of Book Reviews Editor, Kathryn Joynt, and Managing Editor, Angela Ceccato. We thank them for their leadership, commitment, and immense contributions.

As noted in Volume 5, Eddie, Robert and Angela have stepped down as editors, and the four of us are taking over as the new editorial team with this issue. We are joined by Katherine, who will continue as the book reviews editor, and Karin Pampallis, who is succeeding Angela as the Managing Editor. Robert will remain as a consulting editor, and Eddie has agreed to join the advisory board. Our team embodies the transnational perspective of the journal: we are based in Africa, Europe and North America, and our scholarship covers labour movements from across the globe. We are committed to maintaining the core principles and practices that have underpinned the journal to this point. The journal will remain open-access and online. We will continue to publish contributions from across the world, by both established and emerging scholars. And we hope the journal remains a forum and a resource for activists, as well as scholars.

In addition to hosting a new editorial team, the journal now enjoys a range of institutional support that not only expands the journal's network of contributors, readers, and friends, but also provides the resources necessary to ensure that it maintains the levels of professionalism and reliability that have marked its first five years. GLJ has long enjoyed an informal association with the Research Committee on Labour and Labour Movements (RC44) of the International Sociological Association (ISA) since its establishment was first proposed at an RC44 business meeting during the 2006 ISA Congress in Durban, South Africa. At the 2014 ISA Congress in Yokohama, Japan, RC44 formalized this relationship by recognizing GLJ as its official journal. Along with RC44, the journal will be co-hosted by the Global Labour University (GLU). GLU is an academic programme for labour unionists that is housed in six universities around the world and is funded by the International Labour Organization (ILO). GLU is also home to a vibrant community of scholars and activists who have studied in, taught, or supported GLU courses. Finally, the journal will

receive additional support from the International Center for Development and Decent Work (ICDD) at the University of Kassel, Germany, and the Center for Global Workers' Rights (CGWR) at Pennsylvania State University, USA. We thank all our new institutional supporters, and we look forward to working together.

In its first year, the GLJ published a stimulating debate on the prospects of a transnational labour movement capable of countering neoliberal globalisation (see GLJ issues 1.1-2.1). The key theme of this debate was whether the 'pessimism of the intellect' or the 'optimism of the will', to use Antonio Gramsci's famous words, should guide the analysis of contemporary labour movements. In the end, contributors discussed whether Marxian struggles against exploitation or Polanyian struggles against commodification were at the forefront of struggles against neoliberal capitalism. This debate then catalyzed a plethora of scholarship, featured in the GLJ, on workers' responses to the varied labour crises since the 1980s, as well as to the recent global crises in the financial, political, social and ecological realms. Particularly prevalent in the journal's first five years have been articles on innovative organizing strategies and new sources of power for precarious workers, as well as attempts to build transnational labour organizations. Approximately 60 per cent of GLJ's articles have featured in-depth empirical work, while 40 per cent have offered theoretical contributions. Although GLJ's articles have shown a noteworthy focus on the interaction between the local and global, most have focused on a single country, while only a few have compared multiple countries or one industry across countries.¹

Five years on, GLJ author Benjamin Selwyn (2014: 2) argues in the *European Journal of International Relations* that the 'Really Big Question' for international political economy in the 21st century is the future prospects for 'a planetary labouring class of over 3 billion (and rising), living, for the most part, in poverty or near-poverty.' In other words, the experience of exploitation under intensified market competition continues to shape the lives of the world's masses. Workplace-based strategies for labour, therefore, remain significant. At the same time, a merely 'productivist' approach seems obsolete. As Jacklyn Cock notes in GLJ issues 2.3 and 5.1, the ecological crisis (and the threat it poses to humankind) requires labour to embrace struggles that go beyond questions of wages and working conditions.

In the contemporary era of multiple global crises, we no longer appear to be grappling with the question of whether labour should contest neoliberal capitalism through struggles against exploitation or commodification, but how labour should *connect these two types of struggles*. Likewise, the issue is no longer whether labour should embrace transnational forms of organization, but how to do it. In fact, there are numerous examples of labour movements, both historical and contemporary, that have confronted multiple oppressive forces and have built transnational networks in the face of cross-border production networks. Going forward, therefore, we invite contributions exploring the opportunities and challenges of alliances between labour, new social movements, and political parties; innovative strategies and instruments of struggle (including strikes and other forms of industrial action); and the interconnections between different scales of labour organisation. We especially encourage work on livelihood relations that have often been overlooked in labour studies, such as the relationships between labour, land, and the environment; between wage work and unpaid reproductive work; and between class and social identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, and migrant status. Finally, we welcome more work on labor's relationship to the state – a relationship that has not been featured enough in the GLJ to date. We encourage studies on labor's responses to repressive and seemingly accommodating states; labor's relationship to social policy and the welfare state; the ideological underpinnings and prospects of new social contracts; legal reforms and their impact on workers; and the relationship between labor non-governmental organizations and the state. As editors we hope that the journal continues to be a home for both empirically rich analyses of labour movements and theoretical and strategic debate. We hope to

highlight topics, regions, and voices that have not yet been featured in the GLJ, particularly from authors based in the Global South and in countries outside the Anglophone world.

We recognize that the continued success of the journal relies largely on those who will contribute to, read, cite, and otherwise engage with the journal. In that spirit we welcome feedback, ideas, and proposals about how to strengthen the journal. In closing, we once again offer our sincere thanks to Eddie, Robert, and Angela. They have moved the GLJ from an idea to a key node of a thriving intellectual community. Their care and dedication has extended to the work they have put into making the editorial transition as easy as possible for us. We appreciate the opportunity to build upon the work they have begun.

NOTES

1. These trends draw from an analysis of all GLJ articles published to date. The analysis was conducted by Kathryn Joint and Edward Webster and presented at the 2014 ISA World Congress of Sociology, Yokohama, Japan.