

# Editorial

## Celebrating Ten Years of the *Global Labour Journal*

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In 2020, we celebrate the ten-year anniversary of the *Global Labour Journal* (GLJ). The anniversary offers a moment for reflection on the principles and ideas on which the Journal was founded. The aim has always been to create a truly *global* journal of labour studies in terms of the focus of research and the location of both authors and readers. Our hope is that it can help bridge the North–South divide that exists in the production and circulation of knowledge between workers and labour movements across the world.

There are a number of ways in which the Journal is organised in order to achieve this goal. First, the GLJ is a partnership between institutions based in both the Global North and South. The current editors are based at universities in the United States, Germany, Ireland and South Africa. The GLJ is the official journal of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Labour Movements ([RC44](#)). It is co-hosted by: the Center for Global Workers' Rights ([CGWR](#)) at the Pennsylvania State University, USA; the Society, Work and Politics Institute ([SWOP](#)) at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa; and the Global Labour University ([GLU](#)), which itself has institutional bases in both the North and South. Second, in order to ensure that the Journal is available to a global readership, the GLJ has always been fully open access. Third, the editors have attempted to make the Journal widely relevant by having a broad focus – both in terms of geographical coverage and the types of workers and labour movements studied.

The goal of producing a labour studies journal with global reach and relevance has not been without challenges. Although open access makes the GLJ available and free to anyone with access to the Internet, there are broader structural challenges for scholarly initiatives that bypass commercial publishers and are committed to an open-access model. Given the neo-liberalisation of higher education in many parts of the world, obtaining tenure is often tied to publishing in journals with high impact factors. This creates an advantage for publications working with commercial publishers, which are routinely listed by the most common research indices. As a result, junior scholars in particular often hesitate to publish their work in journals like the GLJ.

Despite the best intentions of the Journal editors since the GLJ's founding, achieving greater representation of research, submissions and published articles from the Global South remains a challenge. Language barriers are undoubtedly part of the reason. The availability of research funding and different cultures of research training and academic writing might be other factors. Over time, various Journal editors have identified possible approaches to bridge the gap. To expand awareness of research being carried out in under-represented areas of the world, we could invite more English-language reviews of books published in languages other than English (the first such review was published [here](#) in 2015). Another approach to address language barriers could be to

invite submissions in authors' original language and finding reviewers who could evaluate the submissions in that language. We might also consider publishing short pieces such as book reviews in both English and another language, such as Spanish, Mandarin or Hindi. We could expand our sections on Global Issues, debates and interviews to include more views from the under-represented regions. Finally, as Edward Webster and Robert O'Brien suggest in their article in this issue, we may need to take "proactive steps" to assist authors to meet the GLJ's publication requirements.

Each of these options pose challenges, and some more than others. For example, accepting submissions in languages other than English would present additional language challenges for the editors and require additional funding to translate accepted articles for editing and publication. Yet, despite the challenges, this tenth anniversary is an opportunity for us to consider new ways to expand the GLJ's access and global reach. We will be exploring some of these options in the coming year. We would be happy to receive suggestions from our readers on how we can achieve these goals creatively and innovatively.

Beyond the intention to become a global journal, a main aim set out in the first issue was the need to look at new forms of labour activism beyond established trade unions, and the investigation of precarious and informal labour. Both topics have been addressed extensively over the past ten years. And yet, trade unions continue to play a key role in advancing the interests of workers vis-à-vis employers and governments. As a result, we are facing the challenge of how to overcome, both practically and analytically, the common juxtaposition of trade unions and grassroots organisations and, in a similar fashion, of formal and informal, secure and precarious work. It is obvious that the phenomena on either side of these oppositions constitute and influence each other, and that they overlap considerably in everyday life. We need to encourage conversations across disciplines about these theoretical binaries. To this end we invite scholars in labour studies and beyond to contribute submissions to the GLJ that could, inter alia, help us to grasp the larger processes underlying the transformations of labour relations by exploring the political economy driving these changes, and how political bodies and states are involved.

Considering the need for overarching ideas, it may be worth discussing once more what the concept of class has to offer labour studies – and whether it is possible to address the theoretical and analytical challenges associated with it. The 2016 special issue on [the "politics of precarity"](#) and the on-going debate on power resources ([\(1\)\(2\)\(3\)\(4\)](#)) were some first steps in this direction on the pages of the Journal. But the magnitude of the challenges calls for further research and discussion, and we welcome submissions that address them.

Another issue that merits closer attention concerns the broader political strategies of labour movements. This was widely discussed in the early years of the Journal with reference to the challenge of building transnational alliances – thanks to Michael Burawoy's well-known intervention on ["the false optimism of global labour studies"](#) in its second issue and the numerous reactions to it. Two recent waves of protest afford us the opportunity and obligation to raise the question of strategy once more. The first is the wave of global uprisings and protests against poverty and social inequalities that started in late 2018 and continues to unfold across the planet, with a focus on the Global South. We begin exploring the implications of these protests for labour by publishing a Global Issues piece on Chile in this issue. The second is the global climate movement. It addresses a challenge whose stakes could not be higher because the survival of humankind in its current form is under threat. The debate on the climate crisis has been picked up recently in the Journal ([\(1\)\(2\)](#)), and we will work towards expanding it.

It is important to note that the questions implied in both debates go to the core of labour studies: How political do unions have to be in times of upheaval and system crisis, and can their

organisational logics be adapted to insurgent situations? Will the conservatism of many industrial unions in the West turn them into “dinosaurs” threatened with extinction in the era of a global climate crisis, similar to the automobile industry to which many of them are tied? How can unions and labour movements address the threat of a resurgent far right, which, as Klaus Dörre has demonstrated in a recent [Global Issues piece](#), has some support among trade unionists in East Germany? Is there still the necessity of an explicit and separate “labour movement” in times of broad multi-issue popular movements and if so, why? What does the resurgence of feminism in recent years imply for the strategies of, and the gender relations inside, labour movements and trade unions? What are the threats and opportunities linked to digitalisation and the use of “big data” in the world of work? How is labour scholarship affected by the “[proliferation of precarious labour in academia](#)”, as the Global Issues section from two years ago was titled, and how can it support the recent organisation drives in universities? And where do we stand on the question of labour internationalism a decade after Burawoy voiced his concerns on what he saw as overly optimistic claims on the side of global labour scholars?

In 2020, the GLJ will include articles and reflections that highlight the tenth anniversary and take up some of these questions. In this first issue we begin the commemorations with an article by Edward Webster and Robert O’Brien, the founding editors of the GLJ. They provide a critical assessment of the Journal’s successes and challenges over the past years, drawing on an analysis of the material published in the GLJ since its founding. In the May and September issues later this year, we will be publishing a series of invited pieces that will highlight the importance of a range of topical issues and theoretical perspectives for contemporary global labour studies. We hope that these short interventions will bring new ideas and also some new voices into conversation with the debates that have taken place in the Journal over the past ten years. In addition, on the GLJ’s Facebook page, we will present twelve articles from our archive throughout the year – one every month – and explain why we think they are still highly topical and relevant. This includes both much-cited and influential pieces and lesser-known contributions, which the editors feel represent a cross-section of the Journal’s contributions over the last decade.

We would also like to use this opportunity to thank all the people who have been supporting the Journal over the years – our former editors Eddie Webster, Robert O’Brien, Jenny Chan and Rina Agarwala, whose dedication to the project of a labour studies journal with a global outlook meant that the GLJ was set up and continued to thrive over the years; our generous funders, whose support allows us to do our day-to-day work as an editorial board; RC44 as an intellectual environment and a network from which we benefit both through practical help and the exchange of ideas; our reviewers, whose work usually goes unnoticed but is crucial for ensuring high-quality output; our authors, whose findings and insights continue to astonish us; our advisory board, whose members provide us with helpful advice; and, last but not least, our managing editor Karin Pampallis, without whose tireless and rigorous work it would have simply been impossible to publish the GLJ in the past five years.

We live in times of upheaval and uncertainty, and it is impossible to predict what the GLJ will look like in ten years’ time. But we will do our best, in the remaining years of our term and beyond, to ensure that the GLJ will carry on making its mark as a forum for scholarly and political debate on labour relations and labour movements around the globe, and we invite all our readers, authors and supporters to join in this effort. If the future is indeed unwritten, this may be our small contribution to the struggles of workers around the world for a better life.