Union Revitalisation and the Role of International Solidarity: The Case of ‘All Transport Workers Union’ (TUMTIS) in Turkey

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- What is the role of international solidarity in the process of union revitalisation?

- Declining influence of unions = Diminished capacity

- Union revitalisation: process of (re)gaining power along with the various dimensions of union activity (Behrens et.al, 2004)

- Union power: unions’ abilities to bring significant effects, specifically by furthering their own interests and/or affecting the interests of others, whether positively or negatively (Lévesques and Murray, 2010)

- Union power ↔ Union revitalisation
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Figure 1. Union power resources

Lévesque and Murray, 2010
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Figure 2. Union strategic capabilities

Lévesque and Murray, 2010
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Figure 3. Resources and capabilities for enhanced union capacity

Lévesque and Murray, 2010
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- Trade unions in Turkey: suffer from persistent problems
  - Decrease in membership (35% to 5% since 1980)
  - Restrictive legislation
  - Difficulty for legal recognition
  - Organisational structures

- All Transport Workers Union (TUMTIS)
  - established in 1949, organised in small and medium scale transport companies
UPS campaign: a strategic decision of the union

“Organising in logistic sector is very difficult. TUMTIS would not survive unless organizing in a multinational company. In other words, a campaign was their hope for future. Otherwise, they may exist as a small union and probably would disappear in twenty or thirty years.” (Dinler, ITF Project Coord.)

- Initiated in 2010 and 162 workers sacked
- Global Action Day
- Victory after 282 days of resistance
• DHL campaign: started in 2012
• 37 workers sacked
• Union-busting facilities
• Global Action Day (12/12/12)
• Victory after 476 days of resistance
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Some remarkable points:

- Tradition and legacy
- Strong internal solidarity
- Experience at global campaigns
- Cohesion between goals
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- International solidarity: ‘key element’ of campaigns

- “There are two most prominent features behind the success of campaigns. First one, sacked workers and their colleagues did not give up their struggle and the second one is high level of international solidarity. We do not mention about sentences on paper, we mention about real people going outside. Concrete practise of solidarity goes beyond messages.” (Özturk, President)

- “I have been a member of TUMTIS before working at DHL. Normally ‘international solidarity’ would not go beyond symbolic visits and messages of delegations. But, I felt something more throughout the resistance. Since from our victory, I believe that international solidarity is not a nonsense but a fact” (Yilmaz, DHL worker)
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• “Aim of ITF is not only ‘support’ TUMTIS but also strengthen the capacity of the union and make it capable of doing its own strategic planning and gain required abilities.” (Dinler, ITF Project Coordinator)

• International solidarity:
  • provision of power resources
  • strengthening of capabilities
International solidarity has played a crucial role to achieve the union’s goal of organising in MNCs.

Success of these campaigns have been an important step towards revitalisation of the union.

International solidarity can be a potential leverage for local unions through provision of power resources and strengthening of their capabilities.

Applying to international solidarity as a potential leverage requires considering it together with other power resources of unions in harmony.