



## **Organizing precarious workers in Asia/Pacific food TNCs**

The IUF experience has been that, at the level of organizing, the key has been organizing to negotiate the conversion of precarious employment contracts – both direct “temporary” contracts and agency/labour provider contracts – to direct employment, which brings workers into the collective bargaining unit, provides for equality of treatment and boosts union membership and bargaining power. This is a strategy designed to eliminate the fiction of the triangular employment relationship and focuses on making workers direct, permanent employees. Agency workers, whose formal “equality of treatment” under the EU Directive, for example, clearly remain a group apart if they are not involved in the same collective bargaining relationship with the real employer as permanent workers, and “equality” rarely extends to benefits, for example.

In May 2010 the Milk Food Factory Workers Union at the Horlicks factory in Nabha, India, owned by the pharmaceutical, health and personal care products giant GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), won its fight for the right of casual workers to direct, permanent employment. Under the agreement, 452 casual workers employed on a ‘temporary’ basis for more than a decade were made permanent. Building on this, with the support of the IUF, the union at the company’s Rajmundry plant mobilized around the same demand in their January 2011 bargaining proposals. In July 2011, the union negotiated an agreement which created permanent positions for 205 casual workers, who after two decades of precarious employment could now access their fundamental trade union rights: joining the permanent workers’ union and securing the protection and benefits of the collective agreement, rights they had been denied on the basis of their employment status.

The same organizing/recognition/organizing dynamic has been achieved in the IUF’s global company work, helping win international recognition of the IUF (or strengthening existing relationships within global companies) and stimulating further organizing – a cascade of positive synergies.

In 2009, the IUF initiated a campaign to support the fight for permanent employment at Unilever’s Lipton/Brooke Bond tea factory in Khanewal Pakistan. Direct employment at the factory, and with it union membership, had shrunk over the course of a decade to a mere 22 workers, out of a workforce of around 780. The 22 permanent workers were the only workers at the factory eligible for union membership and a collective bargaining relationship with Unilever. The remaining workers were employed through a number of labour contractors, at a fraction of the wages and benefits of permanent workers, on a “no work, no pay” system. The successful CASUAL-T campaign mobilized global support and led to recognition of the IUF by Unilever, a company whose stated policy had always been to deny recognition to the IUF or indeed to any union organization above the national level.

Comprehensive agreements were reached between the IUF and Unilever at global level. These agreements created hundreds of permanent jobs for contract and casual workers at the Khanewal and Rahim Yar Khan personal products factories, revitalizing union membership and bargaining power. Union membership at Khanewal increased tenfold. The IUF and Unilever now have a structured relationship and meet regularly to review progress on rights issues. Ongoing engagement provides for an international dispute resolution mechanism. This process supported the successful 2011 fight for permanent employment at the Lipton tea facility in Pune, India, where hundreds of casual workers had been on revolving three month contracts for up to 10 years.

The successful experience at Unilever encouraged the Pakistan National Federation of Food, Beverages and Tobacco Workers (NFFBTW) in its struggle for permanent jobs and trade union rights and recognition at Coca-Cola. The IUF 2010 Red Card Penalty Campaign in support of contract workers at Coca-Cola resulted in an agreement establishing a joint review committee at national level to deal with union rights issues at all the company's six plants. Through its Pakistan Office, the IUF supported the NFFBTW's successful drive to organize and register unions at two unorganized plants; all Coca-Cola plants in Pakistan are now unionized and members of the IUF. The conversion of temporary to permanent jobs is a permanent item on the collective bargaining agenda. This in turn has boosted successful fights for permanent jobs at Coca-Cola globally.

These struggles, and many other struggles by the IUF and its affiliates as well as other unions around the world, show that precarious work can be confronted and successfully rolled back by negotiating restrictions on its introduction into the workplace, bringing precarious workers into the bargaining unit and into union membership and negotiating the conversion of precarious to permanent jobs. In many cases, it can be accomplished with the traditional tools of trade union organizing.