

***Building Hotel Workers' Power through Transnational Organizing and Campaigning:
A Case Study from Brazil and the USA***

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The hospitality industry is a major driver of the world economy today, with the travel and tourism sector now accounting for 10.4% of global GDP. 313 million workers, or close to 10% of the global labor force, are currently employed in the sector, with a growing number from emerging markets such as Brazil, China, Nigeria and Russia. While these market conditions create the potential for the generation of significant quantities of decent jobs, especially in developing countries, the new emphasis on franchising and brand management instead of direct administration of properties by large hotel chains has weakened traditional collective bargaining and social dialogue processes between unions and employers in the sector. In order to overcome some of these obstacles, the US hospitality sector union UNITE HERE is using innovative training and organizing models to increase its strength among hotel housekeepers, a largely female workforce which comprises the largest segment of its rank-and-file. UNITE HERE, in conjunction with the Global Union IUF and the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, is also working to export some of these new organizing techniques, as a way to build critical mass for the labor movement in strategic markets for major hotel chains. This paper will present the experience of the joint work that UNITE HERE and its union counterparts in Brazil have been conducting since 2012, campaigning for fair labor practices at a common multinational employer, increasing the density of interactions between union leadership and rank-and file housekeepers, and bringing housekeepers' demands to the forefront of collective bargaining processes. Through the use of these new strategies, Brazilian hospitality unions have begun to increase union affiliation in the sector, cultivate the leadership skills of women unionists, and win concrete economic and non-economic gains for workers – factors which will be essential to helping these unions survive the institutional crisis brought upon the Brazilian labor movement with the passing of the 2017 labor law reform. This paper will argue that, based on the successful experiences of UNITE HERE in the US, hotel worker unions in Brazil must continue to renovate their leadership structures, focus on worker demands that go beyond purely economic concerns, and diversify their repertoire of actions in order to thrive in a politically, economically and institutionally adverse context. The research methodology for this paper will combine the analysis of secondary sources, such as industry-specific publications, union communications, and reports from union activities, with targeted, in-depth interviews of key Brazilian and US actors, as well as participant observation by the researcher.