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**Protection of those working for suppliers and subcontractors:
A challenge for union action**

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Summary: *In this paper, the question I treat is this one: in situations where trade unionists are submitted to the collapse of their work environment and fear for their jobs, to what extent do they, nevertheless, seek to protect workers more fragile than themselves – whether they be employed by subcontractors and suppliers or by subsidiaries of a multinational in poor countries. And, in this respect, given that international framework agreements constitute one tool, amongst others, what other forms of action do they develop ?*

I examine three cases : 1) the reorganisation of trade unions in the multinational France Télécom sought to respond to massive privatisation. The signature of the France Télécom's IFA with the « Alliance France Télécom UNI » linked that workers in rich countries can be in solidarity with African countries. 2) In the case of Lafarge, where South Korean activists came to protest to the multinational Lafarge's head office by chaining themselves, the difficulty for French trade unionists was the lack of knowledge about union life in South Korea and the kinds of action they develop. 3) A strike of Romanian workers, at the Dacia factory, was supported by European trade unionists. This show that « identical situations » represent shared awareness of the harmful effects of restructuring and relocation on a world scale. It currently reflects a fragile identity, which can either be consolidated or disintegrated.

On 6 September 2007, four workers at Woojin Ind. – a South Korean subcontractor of Lafarge Halla-Cement – began a daily demonstration in front of this multinational corporation's headquarters. They came to France to denounce their very hard working conditions (400 hours per month, pay that is significantly below average pay in Korea and so forth) and their dismissal following the creation, in March 2006, of a union section affiliated to the KCTU (Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, which is a member of the International Trade Union Confederation, ITUC). Their company has now closed down and only workers who agreed to leave the union have been taken on by other subcontractors. Those who were dismissed decided to come to Paris in order to seek justice from Lafarge international. They have the support of CGT (Confédération Générale du Travail), who point to the International Framework Agreement (IFA¹), which Lafarge signed in 2005 and which sets out the multinational's responsibility for its suppliers' and subcontractors' respect for the 8 main fundamental ILO conventions. When I wrote this introduction to my draft communication – in November 2007 – it was possible to think that it was exemplary action against the abuses of a subcontractor of a multinational. However, as I will explain below, this action did not develop.

Nevertheless, the protection of those working for suppliers and subcontractors remains an important issue for union action. Negotiating IFAs is one of the tools available to trade unionists, because most often these agreements include clauses protecting those working for suppliers and subcontractors. An initial study², which we carried out of French trade unionists, showed that IFAs represent a new area of collective action. This study showed that most IFAs include clauses concerning the obligations of suppliers and subcontractors. To date, 10 IFAs have been signed with multinationals with headquarters in France: Danone, Accor, Carrefour between 1989 and 2001; and nine since 2004: Club Méditerranée, Renault, EDF (Electricité de France), Rhodia, Lafarge, PSA Peugeot Citroën, France Télécom – in addition to these 10 multinationals, we can add Arcelor and EADS, whose head office moved from France to a different European country, but whose French union members feel particularly concerned. The study made it possible to show how complex it is for unions to take IFAs on board and the dilemmas this situation leads to:

¹ Below : glossary and IFAs signed to date.

² Descolonges M. (2007), *Enjeux supranationaux de l'action syndicale : l'exemple des accords-cadres internationaux. Travailler ensemble autrement*, Paris, IRES.
This study is based on 42 in-depth interviews of trade unionists.

- Preserving the identity of each union *and also* seeking unity in a context of union dispersal that is a feature of the French situation. For example, the negotiation of the IFA, which was signed by Lafarge and the global union federations, IFBWW and ICEM, enabled French union members to “work” together, i.e., to discuss the content of the IFA during the bargaining phase. They made use of relations that had already been established over several years in the European works councils in the building and wood sector. The negotiations were a learning process for all of them and helped them develop.

- Exercising union democracy *and also* using experts when negotiating and monitoring an IFA; “union democracy”, namely decision-making via discussions at the various levels of the union. Indeed, “monitoring” agreements is itself a subject of negotiation³, which encourages using experts – while companies try to incorporate IFAs in their management policies; trade unionists have to discuss reports that are proposed or contribute to drawing up these reports and thus obtain prior information from their peers and develop their own information system. They have to acquire technical skills that are similar to those of professionals. However, trade unionists sometimes mistrust experts, because the latter may refer more to technical rationale rather than to union policies, and thereby run the risk of legitimising the multinational without empowering trade unionists and employees.

- Opening up to international action *and also* xeno-indifference⁴, i.e. withdrawal given the difficulties of the situation, leading to indifference towards foreigners. Indeed, grass roots rationale is likely to win through. It is not possible for unions to push this rationale into the background, as it would mean abandoning those who support it. However, measures related to employment (redundancies and staff reductions) weigh heavily on solidarity and require much explanation. This involves explaining that protecting oneself and abandoning others is also harmful for oneself. At the international level, working to protect other workers in other countries leads to combating social dumping.

- Continuing the history of each union *and also* changing the forms of action and organisation of the international trade union movement.

During the process of demanding and negotiating IFAs, the way in which unions take the agreements on board partially affects their implementation – especially regarding respect for union rights. Trade unionists change their forms of action to the extent that they acquire new forms of representation of the “relevant social group”, i.e. of the group, which legitimises union action, because it knows that it is “represented”. As far as IFAs are concerned, this relevance is worked out on the basis of the protection of other workers, namely those working for suppliers and subcontractors, as well as workers in poor countries and poor workers. This can only happen if unions themselves change.

However, processes of segmenting the workforce are internalised by those working in multinational corporations. They develop ambivalent behaviour towards employees of suppliers and subcontractors, because these are a kind of adjustment variable, which makes their own working conditions and life possible and/or can render their employment situation “fragile”. Trade unions are affected by this. Moreover, in sectors, which are traditionally unionised, union strategy has - for

³ Descolonges M. (2008), *Le caractère infini du “contrôle” des accords-cadres internationaux. Des apprentissages syndicaux*. In Daugareilh I., *Responsabilités des entreprises transnationales dans une économie mondialisée*, Bruxelles, Bruylant-LGDJ.

⁴ Descolonges M. (2006), *Entre ouverture et xéno-indifférence : le dilemme des organisations syndicales françaises*, in Descolonges M. et Saincy B. (dir.), *Les nouveaux enjeux de la négociation sociale internationale*, Paris, La Découverte, 155-188.

several decades already - been to limit the use of subcontractors and demand the incorporation of all employees into the multinational corporation, whatever their status. New forms of work organisation at the international level have led French unions to discuss their policies and the way they organise, given that multinationals no longer hardly have any boundaries. IFAs are tools for doing this, but their use has still not “percolated” within unions. However, other kinds of action are taken, as we will see below.

Based on a new study⁵ – which is in the process of being carried out – our paper provides the beginning of an analysis of the cases of 3 multinationals, namely Lafarge (Building and woodworking industry), France Telecom/Orange (communications sector) and Renault (car industry). This study involves three researchers (two sociologists and a political scientist). It is based on in-depth interviews of a hundred or so trade unionists and of the managers of ten multinationals, and examines several situations in Europe and abroad.

Can workers in rich countries be in solidarity with poor countries? The example of France Télécom

The reorganisation of trade unions in the multinational, France Télécom, took place in 2000⁶ and sought to respond to massive privatisation. In the different countries concerned, notably in Europe and Africa, the employers, who had been States and were in a monopoly situation, disappeared and multinationals took their place⁷.

The France Télécom group employs about 200,000 people throughout the world. Currently, most of its new acquisitions are outside France. It is present in all countries, but has more than 300 employees in about twenty, including in Africa. As far as social dialogue is concerned, the group combines local social dialogue with a European works council, and there are ongoing negotiations regarding a worldwide body. At the end of 2007, given the group's profits, France Télécom's management announced a “world bonus”, linked to results, for all employees.

Awareness of belonging to the same group is varied. It mainly depends on the definition of protective schemes: Who are they aimed at? What do they concern? What do they guarantee? There are many gaps regarding the knowledge of the real situation of France Télécom's subcontractors. Everyone knows about the existence of call centres scattered throughout the world, but in France itself, the company limits its use of subcontractors, because of its history. Moreover, in France, trade unionists inherited a situation, where the company was a monopoly and employees had civil service status; they develop action aimed above all at protecting the company's employees.

To date, the most detailed response regarding protection is provided by the IFA, which was the result of long negotiations and was signed by the group and the UNI France Télécom Alliance in December 2006. It contains five main points:

- Respect for fundamental human rights (ILO fundamental conventions);
- The bases of an employment policy promoting international mobility (notably via training), committed to equal pay between men and women for equal work, as well as introducing support

⁵ Descolonges M. (dir.), Calderon J., Chelly L., « *La protection du maillon le plus faible : enjeux de l'action syndicale au sein de la sous-traitance et des fournisseurs des multinationales. Les usages des accords-cadres internationaux* », Paris, IRES.

⁶ Named “Alliance UNI France Télécom”.

⁷ In line with Ulrich Beck, is it possible to think that, following on from national deregulation, IFAs might constitute prefiguration of “transnational re-regulation”? Beck U. (2003), *Pouvoir et contre-pouvoir à l'heure de la mondialisation*, Flammarion, p. 344.

- measures in cases of restructuring;
- Principles promoting health and safety at work, as well as working conditions of the group's employees and those working for subcontractors;
- Informing suppliers and subcontractors about the existence of the agreement, with a preferential clause;
- Clauses anticipating disputes, aimed notably at finding solutions if the IFA is not respected.

These principles show that African unions – the France Télécom group is now established in ten or so African countries - are very active in the UNI France Télécom Alliance and managed to be taken into account by trade unionists in rich countries. The IFA gives them means that they did not have until now. It is very much in line with demands that they have made for several years already. Some of them - concerning recognition of the union movement, preserving jobs, measures promoting mobility and social protection measures – have been incorporated into the IFA. The shared benefit is that labour relations, which are removed from the internal domain of the multinational, become a public issue⁸ that is discussed and negotiated, including in countries where social rights are weak.

But the IFA also has a downside. If, on the one hand, it illustrates the ability of European unions to open up to the unions in poor countries, it also shows that solidarity between countries – the subject of IFAs – has a cost. In this case, the extension of rights of workers in poor countries was obtained, whereas the multinational's management put limits to its undertakings regarding union recognition.

Multinationals, in fact, protect themselves against undertakings that they know they cannot or do not want to make, in the name of the legal independence of their subsidiaries and differing national rules. France Télécom claims to have a “neutral attitude to trade unions” and the agreement signed with the group worries trade unionists. In fact, it limits the impact of the union movement where it has few members or where the group has acquired private operators with no unions. Trade unionists fear that the employee representation introduced by the group (employee associations elected by their peers) will lead to long-term absence of unions.

Lafarge and the South Koreans: problematic use of subcontractors

South Korean activists, who came to protest at the multinational Lafarge's head office by chaining themselves, won nothing in the end. They refused to sign the agreement, which had been negotiated with the South Korean management, and went home when their visas expired.

In the agreement, management committed itself to several points, which had also received the agreement of the French union:

- Conditions of re-employment by the subcontractors. These were promised, although initially the workers had been obliged to give up their union membership (to the KCTU), given that only one union is authorised in each company.
- Reimbursement of basic pay lost since the beginning of the dispute (March 2006).
- Plan to organise a visit of the company (paid for by the Lafarge group) with the IFBWW and the ICEM on working conditions.

The action of the South Korean workers must be placed in the context of a foreseeable crisis in the cement industry. It could be related to two problems – on the one hand, slowing down of

⁸ Rancière J. (2005), *La haine de la démocratie*, La Fabrique, Paris.

world consumption and a credit crisis affecting the Building sector, and on the other hand, the implementation of the Kyoto protocol and the impact of CO2 emissions throughout the world, which is leading cement manufacturers to relocate their production sites. All cement manufacturers are affected by this.

As far as South Korea is concerned, the dispute arose after Lafarge took over a local consortium. The multinational then isolated the heart of the industrial process and distributed production to subcontractors. Thus workers, who were originally directly employed by the cement works, became employees of subcontractors. The latter pay extremely low wages and workers have to do much overtime in order to earn decent pay.

In South Korea, most union activity takes place in subcontractors. The difficulty for French trade unionists was not related to the status of the workers, but – in spite of information provided by the global union federations – to lack of knowledge about union life in South Korea and the kinds of action they take.

Renault-Dacia : a strike by Romanian workers, supported by European trade unionists

At the end of the month of March 2008, workers at the Dacia factory - which is part of the French car manufacturer Renault - in Romania, took strike action that lasted 18 days and won satisfactory results. This was one of the first strikes in the private sector since the end of the Communist regime in Romania in 1989. At the end of the 1990s, miners in the Jiu Valley went on strike. The Dacia strike took place in a new situation – the dispute reflects the effects of multinationals establishing themselves in a country with low labour costs. Romania entered the European Union on 1 January 2007 and its citizens can now more easily compare their situation with that of other Europeans – and they find reasons for rebellion.

We will begin by presenting one of the aspects of Renault's social policy and then focus on the Dacia factory and the strike that took place there. Finally, we will try to identify the particular features of this very unusual kind of strike. It should be noted that this paper was written in the days immediately following the strike and runs the risk of simplifying its significance. One really needs to be able to stand back a little in order to analyse the complexity of the strike.

It is interesting to refer to one of the instruments of social regulation at the international level, adopted by Renault's management, namely the IFA it signed with the IMF and the French, Spanish and Belgian national unions in 2004. Indeed, its signature symbolises the way in which the opening up of multinationals to the social dimensions of globalisation is negotiated. It had been preceded by the signing of IFAs by four multinationals, whose head offices are situated in France (Danone, Accor, Carrefour and Club Méditerranée). This agreement aimed at initiating another wave of agreements signed by multinationals. It was the first, in France, which took into account the whole productive chain – including employee representatives, subsidiaries and suppliers.

It is not called an “International Framework Agreement”, but a “Declaration on fundamental social rights of the Renault Group”. The corporation was in the process of establishing itself in countries that are “at risk” and management considered it necessary to make commitments regarding such issues as health and safety, working conditions, banning child and forced labour, equal opportunities, employment, training rights, working time and the right to paid holidays, wages, employee representation and relations with suppliers. It created measures for monitoring the agreement.

The reports on the agreement, which are presented each year by Renault's management to

union officers, are based on audits. The latter focus on social rights, but use an approach similar to that of used in quality processes. The reports show that Renault aims at consistency regarding the whole productive chain, including “behaviour”. Two main concerns have been expressed: on the one hand, respect for working conditions in *subsidiaries*, which are subject to measures that are reflected in a quality label; on the other hand, a key subject is that of the suppliers. Indeed, those in charge of the purchasing department make 1st rank suppliers sign the “Declaration” (IFA) and they are then responsible for using it in their own contracts with their own subcontractors and suppliers.

In 2008, Renault is present in 118 countries. It is a generalist multinational incorporating many makes. Its worldwide dimension was acquired via its alliance with Nissan, its acquisition on the Romanian manufacturer Dacia and by creating the South Korean company, Renault Samsung Motors. The multinational has about 130,000 employees.

Dacia was acquired by Renault in 1999 and has invested 489 million Euros over a 5-year period in order to modernise its new subsidiary. The “Dacia platform” is in Mioveni (about 120 kms from the capital city Bucharest) on land granted by the town at an attractive price. 50% of the Mioveni's budget depend on Dacia and more than a third of the town's adults work for the company. There are also many employees in Pitesti (the county town, which is a dozen kms away from the Dacia site). When Renault acquired Dacia in 1999, 10,000 people were made redundant, as Renault came with its own suppliers, the equipment manufacturers, Valeo, Faurecia, etc., who used other kinds of technology than that used by Dacia. The redundancies were absorbed by the local fabric (small manufacturers, agriculture and retirement). The mayors of both towns say that it would be impossible for them to recover if Renault should leave.

Dacia employs almost 14,000 people. It says that it has a 90.8% access rate to training. In 2006, Dacia obtained the SSECT label (Santé, Sécurité, Ergonomie et Conditions de Travail: Health and Safety, Ergonomics and Working Conditions), thus proving that its management system is in line with Renault's requirements. It is the quality label referred to in the IFA monitoring process. Dacia has successfully commercialised a low-cost car, called the Logan. 1,300 Logans are produced daily in the Mioveni factory. In 2007, Dacia increased sales by 17.4%, compared with 2006. Employees know about these figures.

Renault has created a specific body for informing employees. The “Renault Group Works Council” is in line with the European Union directive on the obligation to create “European Works Councils” (EWC). It fulfils the obligations of EWCs – for example, it met in 2006 and 2007 on restructuring of Renault in Europe. But it also has a bigger information and training role than that outlined in the directive on EWCs. It brings together 39 employee representatives - from EU countries and also from European countries, which are not members of the EU, as well as from Argentina, Brazil and South Korea. Once a year, the multinational's results are presented to and training is provided. An “inner group council” (comité de groupe restreint) has also been created. It is composed of 10 trade union representatives from the European Union (a Slovenian, a Romanian, two Spaniards, a Hungarian, a Belgian and four French). It meets more frequently than the Works Council and receives regular information on the corporation. A union officer from the Dacia factory became a member when Romania entered the European Union. The body promotes discussions between union members in the different countries, who thereby learn about union rationalities⁹ that are different from their own.

The strikers' demands mainly concerned pay. The rises demanded – 60% at the beginning and then 40% - must be placed in the Romanian context. Romania was a “People's democracy” after the Second World War and experienced an “uprising for democracy” in 1989. But the country had

⁹ Using Weber's meaning

become one of the poorest in Europe. Following a recession in the 1990s, Romania's growth rate has been over 4% since 2000. Inflation dropped from 15.3% in 2003 to 6.6% in 2006.

It has an economically active population of 10 million: 31.6% in agriculture, 30.7% in industry and 37.7% in services. Employment rates have dropped over the past five years¹⁰, with a significant drop of those between 55 and 64 years old. The unemployment rate has remained stable (7.2%), but the under-25s are particularly concerned (21.6%)¹¹. Undeclared work is estimated to be as high as 23% and is not decreasing¹². In 2005, eight Romanian regions had a per capita GDP (income of private households) less than 75% of the EU average¹³. Although Romania is considered to be a country with “low labour productivity” and low R&D intensity¹⁴, the latter is nevertheless increasing significantly¹⁵.

The population of Romania is estimated to be 21,423,400¹⁶ and is on the decline. More people are leaving the country than entering¹⁷. Labour migration mainly concerns three sectors: health and services, Building and agriculture. It is estimated that at least 2 million Romanian citizens work abroad and 80% of them have at least secondary level education. Low pay is the main reason for emigrating¹⁸.

Romania entered the EU on 1 January 2007 and has been seeking, for several years already, to adapt its labour legislation and industrial relations system. Trade unions and employers' organisations have undergone major changes. The annual report on violations of union rights, which was published in 2007 by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), points to “trade union liberties in law”, but, in practice, “curbs on unionisation”; sectors where “collective bargaining (is) hazardous” in spite of a Constitution that stipulates annual bargaining¹⁹; as well as “limited application of the Labour Code” given few institutional resources for dealing with labour disputes.

The installation of factories in Romania leads to polemics. Thus, at the end of February 2008, when the Finnish company Nokia opened its first production line in Jucu (in North West Romania), it was accused of a “new form of slavery” by the national trade union confederation, Cartel-Alfa: weekly hours increased from 48 to 60-70, and many short contracts are said to be used. France is the fourth biggest foreign investor. Subsidiaries of French companies employ at least 90,000 people²⁰. Amongst them are seven multinationals (whose head offices are in France) that have signed IFAs: Accor, Carrefour, Dacia-Renault, Danone, France Télécom (Orange), Lafarge and Rhodia. Other multinationals that have signed IFAs include, for example, Ikea, Lukoil and Volkswagen.

The trade union confederations have put pay increases on the bargaining agenda. At the end of 2006, they demanded gross minimum monthly pay to increase to 142 Euros, instead of the 97 Euros paid at the time²¹. A national framework agreement for the period 2007-2010, fixed it at 130

¹⁰ Annuaire régional d'Eurostat 2007, p. 52.

¹¹ Eurostat. Euro-indicateurs, communiqué du 7 janvier 2008.

¹² Gritsai Olga (2007), EU, DG Emploi et Affaires sociales. Séminaire sur l'évaluation de l'ampleur du travail non déclaré (Bruxelles, 13/12/07).

¹³ Eurostat. Communiqué du 12 février 2008.

¹⁴ Annuaire régional d'Eurostat 2007, p. 92.

¹⁵ Idem, p. 73

¹⁶ Eurostat. Données en bref, Premières estimations démographiques pour 2007, janvier 2008.

¹⁷ Annuaire régional d'Eurostat 2007, p. 17.

¹⁸ Eurofound, EIROonline, 2006, « Growing concern over labour shortage due to migration ».

¹⁹ See also: Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, « ILO upholds trade union claim that right to strike is curtailed ».

²⁰ Ambassade de France en Roumanie – mission économique, « Les investissements français en Roumanie : diversifiés et structurants », 30 janvier 2008.

²¹ Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, « National minimum wage levels set for 2007 ».

Euros for the private sector, while the State fixed it at 115 Euros for public companies²². This difference in minimum pay in the private and public sectors highlighted the fact that the employers' organisations were aware of the need to increase pay, in order to keep skilled labour force in the country. A few months later, in the name of increasing productivity, stabilising the labour force and accessing the "European social model", the unions demanded a 35 to 60% increase in minimum pay²³. They emphasised that average Romanian pay is 60% below the EU average²⁴. At the end of 2007, all five confederations spoke of the possibility of calling a general strike if pay was not increased. An agreement between the three parties (State, employers, trade unions) set minimum pay at 135 Euros per month for everyone. However, negotiations continue, as the unions gave provisional agreement exclusively for the first quarter of 2008²⁵.

The strike at Dacia was called by the "Dacia car branch", which is a member of the *Federatia Sindicala a Lucratorilor din Industrie-Metal (FSLI-Metal)*, which is affiliated to the *Confederation Blocul National Sindical (BNS)*, founded in 1991. This confederation is a member of international union organisations (ITUC and IMF) and European ones (ETUC and EMF).

It is the biggest union branch in Romania, organising Dacia employees and those of its (1st rank) suppliers. Thus partial or total lay-offs of the equipment manufacturing staff because the strike by Dacia employees did not create dissension. On the one hand, the former received 85% of their pay, as stipulated contractually; and, on the other hand, according to Renault management, the suppliers will also probably have to award a pay increase. In any case, the demand was made during bipartite negotiations in the first quarter of 2008. While respecting the different stages of the bargaining process, union members in the supplier companies announced that they will go on strike if their demand is not met.

The strikers received much support both nationally and internationally. The extent and diversity of solidarity action were great and it was not limited to one industry or country. The confederations, BNS and *Cartel Alfa*, were present throughout the strike, as well as the postal workers and teachers amongst public sector unions – whose membership is high and who supported them on many occasions. Union delegations from private companies and subsidiaries of multinationals were also present on several occasions, notably the new Ford subsidiary, which had been taken over just two weeks before the strike began at Dacia. Mittal workers, who were present at meetings organised by the strikers, went on strike themselves.

In some ways, the *national* character of the strike at Dacia must be emphasised. Although the strike took place with European unions following it closely, it had to respect national procedures. Indeed, in the absence of a European right to strike, only the rules of each State apply. Right from the beginning of the strike, Dacia management spoke of its "illegality" and asked the commerce court to stop it. The court postponed its decision twice and finally concluded that the strike was legal – for a strike to be legal, more than 50% of the employees concerned must be on strike, and bargaining procedures must be respected. The court's decision also implicated the Romanian legal system, which is known to be corrupt and its decisions can be contested. Thus, at the last meeting held the day after the court's decision, trade unionists shouted "no, our justice is not corrupt!".

The strike was related to a more general demand for an increased standard of living for Romanians. Dacia's management immediately raised the issue of possible relocation to Russia and India, where Renault is already established. The issue is a national one, as Romania has been

²² Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, « Social partners sign national collective agreement for 2007-2010 ».

²³ Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, « Unions propose up to 60 % increase in minimum wage ».

²⁴ Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, « Unions threaten to call general strike over minimum wage level ».

²⁵ Eurofound, EIROonline, 2007, *idem*.

chosen by many multinationals, precisely because of low labour costs, and also a potentially rapid increase in the level of qualifications. Thus, besides recognition of their work by a pay increase, Dacia workers sought also to have recognition of their increased skills and the courses they have been on – evidence of this was the presence of engineers and technicians at the meetings. At the last meeting during the strike, union members' speeches reflected this demand for recognition – they spoke of “respect for their work” and “equal pay for equal work”. The strike was closely followed by the national media, which relayed worries about relocation.

In this respect, the role of the various State bodies was questioned and their powers seemed marginal in the face of the decisions made by multinationals, but possible support for the strikers was not. Thus the mayors of Mioveni and Pitesti explicitly supported them and did so concretely by, each in turn, authorising a meeting in a public place. The pre-electoral context of the strike was not insignificant and the strikers used “political opportunities and resources”²⁶. But the opening up of politicians, such as the mayors, to their cause, was not general, and their opponents were also vocal. The strikers' awareness of this opposition was reflected in many slogans demanding that the government - and especially the Prime Minister - resign, i.e. those, who in their opinion, were not supporting them.

Another “national” dimension of this strike was the expression of xenophobic feelings. Speakers and slogans referred to “thieves” - “foreign multinationals”, “French employers” (and sometimes “the French”) were accused, as well as the “Romanian bosses” and the government. Indeed, threats of relocation exacerbated both fear and feelings of injustice. Europe, as a whole, is currently experiencing a wave of xenophobia, resulting partly from worries about jobs. In 2007, the announcement by EADS of 10,000 redundancies showed that “unity had to conquer a strong increase in the nationalism of sites and nations”²⁷; IG Metall union (Germany) and the French union Force Ouvrière showed their differences publicly. Moreover, integration of Romania into the EU turned it into an entry point for citizens from the Third World. A government plan of action interlinking control, prevention and integration was drawn up at the end of 2007.

Such hostile expressions went along with the demand to acquire a real “status of European citizen”. It is true that European trade union solidarity was strongly expressed and communicated to the strikers. The latter were able to position their action within a European context of demands concerning pay. The European demonstration in Ljubljana took place during the strike and the speech by ETUC general secretary, John Monks, in which he referred to the it, was explained to the strikers at their meeting in Pitesti. French Renault unions sent messages of solidarity and made press statements. The CGT and CFDT were present at meetings organised by the strikers. They collected money at the Renault sites in France for the Dacia strikers. The French media reported widely on the strike.

The Dacia strikers won an increase in gross pay of about 100 Euros per month in two stages, as well as an annual bonus of 251 Euros. Renault management pointed out that Dacia workers earn more than average Romanian pay. It still has to be seen whether those working for the equipment manufacturers will benefit from these increases, and whether other sectors will also benefit.

The strike led to the birth of new international union players, whose action renews issues raised in the 1960s and '70s. In the mid-1970s, the emergence of “multinational trade unionism” was announced. A leading example was the action taken by the then-ICF (now ICEM) against the Dutch company, Akzo – one of the biggest chemicals corporations in the world. Nine clandestine union activists were fired by the Spanish subsidiary in Barcelona and were threatened with being blacklisted. “The American transport union, the Teamsters, which is one of our affiliates and has 2.5

²⁶ Groux G., Pernot J.-M. (2008), *La grève*, Les Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 45-77.

²⁷ Tartakovsky P. (2007), *Syndicalisme : nationalismes pas morts...*, in *La lettre de Mètis*, N° 7, avril.

million members, publicly announced that it would no longer transport any Akzo products on American roads, until the problem was resolved in Barcelona. The 9 union activists were taken back on²⁸. Belonging to the same industrial group seemed to create the conditions for increasing awareness, on the basis of identical situations created by their relationship with the same global, centralised management²⁹.

Throughout Europe, there are fewer strikes. Legal resources available to unions make it difficult, as do, even more so, pressures of “mass unemployment, flexibility and the disappearance of special protective statuses”³⁰. New forms of labour management introduced by companies must also doubtless be added to these factors. Nevertheless, labour disputes continue to take place – the strike at Dacia and solidarity with it are evidence of this. They show that “identical situations” are not only related to being part of a centralised multinational, but also represent shared awareness of the harmful effects of restructuring and relocation on a world scale. It currently reflects a fragile identity, which can either be consolidated or disintegrate. It contributes to negotiating new rules concerning globalisation, such as international framework agreements.

In conclusion

The question we posed was the as follows: in situations where trade unionists are subjected to the collapse of their work environment and fear for their jobs, to what extent do they, nevertheless, seek to protect workers who are more fragile than themselves – whether they be employed by subcontractors and suppliers or by subsidiaries of a multinational in poor countries. And, in this respect, given that international framework agreements constitute one tool, amongst others, what other forms of action do they develop?

In the case of Woojin Inc's workers, who came from South Korea to demand justice from the Lafarge multinational, we have seen that the IFA was a weak means for questioning the multinational about its responsibilities in relation to its subcontractors. From this point of view, the content of a multinational's undertakings is less important than assertion of its responsibilities. Indeed, the installation of Lafarge in South Korea led to the collapse of the industrial fabric and a loss of status and resources related to this status for the workers concerned. From the point of view of French trade unionists, difficulties in understanding the types of union action taken by the South Korean workers, which were different from theirs, led at first to reactivation of union dispersion, which is a feature that is specific to the French union movement. The possibilities of stabilising joint understanding were then facilitated by the regulatory role of the global union federations (IFBWW and ICEM).

For union members in European countries – and notably for French trade unionists – negotiating the IFA at France Télécom represented a cost. They finally agreed to sign the agreement, which accepts non-union representation of workers in countries where union representation is weak or non-existent. The argument of “neutrality” used by France Télécom's management is based on respect for industrial relations rules in each country. However, they consider the following to be equivalent: on the one hand, loss of the special protective status of employees of telecommunications companies that have been privatised, and on the other hand, the considerable profits made by France Télécom in African countries – and they focus their action on social benefits that the Africans should rightfully receive. In this way, trade unionists in rich

²⁸ Levinson Ch. (1974), *Les multinationales des travailleurs*, Entretien donné au journal l'Unité, n° 118, 5 au 11 Juillet, 19-22.

²⁹ Lavieq J.-P. (1975), *Syndicats et sociétés multinationales*, Délégation à l'aménagement du territoire et à l'action régionale, Travaux et recherches de prospective, n° 58, p. 96 (à propos du conflit Akzo).

³⁰ Groux G., Pernot J.-M. (2008), *La grève*, op. cit., 124-132.

countries have accepted that the IFA, which was signed at the end of 2006, mainly contains demands that had been formulated by African unions for several years already.

In the strike organised by the union at Dacia, a Renault subsidiary in Romania, the IFA plays a peripheral role. It is not referred to. But presentations of the company report in sessions of the Renault Group Works Council in the months preceding the strike contributed to shared knowledge about the multinational. They contributed to providing the Romanian trade union members with information. But even more so, participation in the Group Works Council of trade unionists from countries where Renault has its main subsidiaries contributes to creating links between them and, in this case, has promoted the development of shared awareness of the harmful effects of the relocation and installation of multinationals in “low cost” countries.

In all three cases that have been presented, the existing industrial fabric was destroyed by the multinational's installation. Whether in the form of attempts to understand what was at stake for the Wojin Inc. workers, or of promoting the demands of African trade unionists, or of solidarity with the strikers at Dacia, it is possible to note the presence of what can be called awareness of shared interests, as the trade unionists assume that these dangers threaten them as well. But, as Hirschman has shown, such awareness does not in itself suffice to go on to collective action³¹, because the cost can seem too great. It is precisely this notion of being “too” great that has been surpassed by the French trade unionists in the France Télécom multinational, who were able to constitute a latent group or what we have called “relevant social group”. Following Durkheim³², one could say about the solidarity, which was expressed in a concrete way (via being present and collecting money) with the Dacia strikers, that action is taken on condition that there is a feeling of belonging and being at one with – in other words, identifying with the passions, feelings and ideas of a social group and participating in shared thinking, i.e. sharing representations³³.

³¹ Hirschman A.O. (1970), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty. Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations and States*, Harvard University Press. En français, *Face au déclin des entreprises et des institutions*, Les Editions Ouvrières, 1972.

³² Durkheim E. (1930), *De la division du travail social. Préface de la seconde édition*, Quadrige, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1986.

³³ Durkheim E., *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*, Paris, PUF, 1977, Préface de la seconde édition, p. 27.

Appendix I: **Glossary**

BNS	Blocul National Sindical (Romania)
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (France)
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail (France)
EU	European Union
EWC	European Works Council
EMF	European Metal Workers Federation
FO	Force Ouvrière (France)
FSLI-Metal	Federatia Sindicala a Lucratorilor din Industrie-Metal (Romania)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical Energy Mine
IG Metall	Industriegewerkschaft Metall (Germany)
IFA	International Framework Agreement
IFBWW	International Federation of Building and Wood Workers
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Metal Workers Federation
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
KCTU	Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (South Korea-
UNI	Union Network International

Appendix II: **International Framework Agreements**

signed to date (April 2008)

Company	FSI	Industry branch	Country	Year
Accor	IUF-UITA	Tourism	France	1995
Anglolod	ICEM	Mines	South Africa	2002
Arcelor	IMF	Metalworking industry	Luxemburg	2005
Ballast-Nedam	IFBWW	Building	Netherlands	2002
National Australia Bank	UNI	Bank	Australia	2006
BMW	IMF	Car industry	Germany	2005
Bosch	IMF	Automotive	Germany	2004
Brunel	IMF	Metalworking industry	Netherlands	2007
Carrefour	UNI	Retail	France	2001
Chiquita	IUF-UITA	Agriculture	USA	2001
Club Méditerranée	IUF-UITA	Tourism	France	2004
Daimler-Chrysler	IMF	Car industry	Germany	2002
Danone	UITA	Food industry	France	1988
EADS	IMF	Spatial	Netherlands	2005
EDF	ICEM,PSI,OIEM, FMTI	Energy	France	2005
Endesa	ICEM	Energy	Spain	2002
ENI	ICEM	Energy	Italy	2002
Euradius	UNI	Printing	Netherlands	2006
Faber-Castell	IFBWW	Office equipment	Germany	2000
Falck	UNI	Property service	Denmark	2005

Fonterra	IUF-UITA	Dairy industry	New-Zealand	2002
France Télécom	UNI	Telecommunications	France	2006
Freudenberg	ICEM	Textile	Germany	2000
GEA	IMF	Engineering	Germany	2003
H & M	UNI	Retail	Suède	2004
Hochtief	IFBWW	Building	Germany	2000
Ikea	IFBWW	Retail	Sweden	1998
Impregilo	IFBWW	Building	Italy	2004
ISS	UNI	Property service	Denmark	2003
Lafarge	IFBWW, ICEM, FMCB	Building	France	2005
Leoni	IMF	Electricity Car industry	Germany	2003
Lukoil	ICEM	Energy	Russie	2004
Merloni (Indesit)	IMF	Metalworking industry	Italy	2001
METRO	UNI	Retail	Germany	1999
Nampak	UNI	Packaging	South Africa	2006
Norske Skog	ICEM	Paper	Norway	2002
OTE	UNI	Telecommunications	Greece	2001
Portugal telecom	UNI	Telecommunications	Portugal	2006
Prym	IMF	Car industry	Germany	2004
PSA-Peugeot-Citroën	IMF	Car industry	France	2006
Quebecor	UNI	Printing	Canada	2007
RAG	ICEM	Chemical	Germany	2003
Renault	IMF	Car industry	France	2004
Rheinmetall	IMF	Car industry	Germany	2003
Rhodia	ICEM	Chemical	France	2005
Röchling	IMF	Automotive	Germany	2004
Royal BAM Group	IFBWW	Building	Netherlands	2006
SCA	ICEM	Paper	Sweden	2004
Schwan Stabilo	IFBWW	Office	Germany	2005
Securitas	UNI	Services	Sweden	2006
Skanska	IFBWW	Building	Sweden	2001
SKF	IMF	Manufacturing	Sweden	2003
Staedtler	IBB	Office	Germany	2006
Statoil	ICEM	Energy	Norway	1998
Telefonica	UNI	Telecommunications	Spain	2000
Umicore	IMF	Metalworking industry	Belgia	2007
Veidekke	IFBWW	Building	Norway	2005
Volker Wessels	IFBWW	Building	Netherlands	2007
Volkswagen	IMF	Car industry	Germany	2002
Waz	IFJ	Media	Germany	2007
Zara (Inditex)	ITGLWF	Textil	Spain	2007