



Norwegian University
of Life Sciences

Master's Thesis 2021 30 ECTS

Faculty of Landscape and Society

Department of International Environment and Development Studies

Labor Unions as Transnational Actors

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International Relations

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Declaration

I, Sara Narancic, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature.....

Date.....

Acknowledgements

Five individuals have been fundamental for the writing of this thesis. I begin with my supervisor Dag Einar Thorsen from the USN School of Business, Department of Business, Strategy and Political Sciences. Your support has been great. While some people thrive under a strict regime, I thrive when I am shown compassion. You have been nothing but patient and kind to me. As we now part ways and you go on to supervise many more students, know that I am forever grateful for being paired with you. Your personality was exactly what I needed to overcome certain mental blockages and fears I had when writing my master's thesis.

I also want to thank my mother Ljilja Narancic and my brother Stefan Narancic. Thank you, mom, for initiating political discussions at the dinner table. Our countless arguments – sometimes loud and loaded, spanning into the late hours of the night, forced my brother and I to develop our social and political senses. Also, thank you for being passionate about your own work. It has motivated me to never settle until I love, and find meaningful, what I do. My brother, I want to thank you for your intellect. It is a level which I can only ever dream of reaching. Please, this sincerity is not something I enjoy. I wish none of you to address me further about this affectionate paragraph.

I want to thank my partner of ten years, Anton Furberg Burén. You have always supported and valued what I do – even when it has put us through financially difficult times. I know that you are proud of what I have accomplished, and it warms my heart deeply.

I finally want to thank the greatest love of my life, my dog Wiggles. Without you, my shiny copper-colored sack of joy, I would have not managed to pursue my dreams. You make me brave. I hope you know what you mean to me.

Thank you Noragric, for all the lovely years!

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Abbreviations

AFL – Alberta Federation of Labour

AUPE – Alberta Union of Provincial Employees

BCGEU – British Columbia General Employees’ Union

BFAWU – The Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union

CLC – Canadian Labour Congress

CUPE – Canadian Union of Public Employees

CUPW – Canadian Union of Postal Workers

FBU – Fire Brigades Union

GMB – GMB Union

HEAL – The Health, Environment, Agriculture and Labor Food Alliance

HEU – Hospital Employees’ Union

HSA – Health Sciences Association

ILO – International Labour Organization

ILWU – International Longshore and Warehouse Union

ITUC – International Trade Union Confederation

IWGB – Independent Workers’ Union of Great Britain

NEU – National Education Union

NFU Canada – National Farmers Union, Canada

NFU U.S. – National Farmers Union, United States

NUPGE – National Union of Public and General Employees

OSSTF – Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation

PRLC – Peel Regional Labour Council

PSAC – Public Service Alliance of Canada

TUC – Trades Union Congress

UFCW – United Food and Commercial Workers Union

Unifor – Unifor the Union

UNISON – UNISON the Public Service Union

USW – United Steelworkers

USWLocal2009 – The United Steelworkers Canada Local 2009

1. Introduction

Inequality within the world of work is growing, while membership in labor unions is declining (United Nations, 2020, p. 155). This inequality is not an outcome of union decline or vice versa, but it nonetheless raises questions relating to the capacities of labor unions in strengthening workers' rights around the world. As multifaceted actors of local, national, and international scope, labor unions – who have historically built political capacity and agency in societies by mobilizing members and safeguarding workers' rights and freedoms (Rosenfeld, 2019), now have a “cloud of uncertainty” hanging over their future (Visser, 2019, p. 9). Some commentators argue that labor unions are organizations of the past (Darlington, 2014), while others view them as “vital equalizing force[s]” in society (Rosenfeld, 2019, p. 21). According to the ILOs Declaration for the Future of Work (2019), a “continuous and concerted action of [...] representatives of employers and workers” is fundamental for achieving substantial democracy, peace, and justice (ILO, 2019, p. 2). To understand why labor unions appear to be important actors, we must firstly understand what they are.

Wright (2005) defines labor unions as “[t]he collectivities people form in order to facilitate the pursuit of class interests” (p. 21). In this regard, they primarily exist to serve their members' class-interests. Pencavel (2007) furthermore outlines three ways that labor unions operate in: the wage-making activities; the political activities; and the role of unions in regulating the employment relationship (p. 424). The spatial levels of union engagements are often situated on the local or national level (Herod, 2020), and unions operate in a tripartite relationship where they represent and mediate employee interests with employers and the state (Forrester, 2010). It is within the political activities of labor unions that we may see their operationalization extend beyond Wright's (2005) definition. Labor unions, hence, balance inequalities in physical workplaces, and they also help create normative directions for labor related policy and legislation which may communicate out into larger society. Labor unions are one of “the world's largest membership organizations” (Cotton & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2012, p. 708), and their past contributions for substantial legislative and normative labor change of international scope have created many of the norms which the global economy operates on today.

The first labor unionization with massive societal effects took place during the late 19th and early 20th century. There was a triple alliance between coal workers, railway workers, and dockers, who managed to gain a new kind of power by organizing, sharing ideas, and creating political alliances, through their physical power over the extraction of coal (Mitchell,

2009). Such workers were the typical union members of the time (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015). Coal workers hence played the leading role in labor activism during this period, and coal related workers' movements helped democratize industrialized countries (Mitchell, 2009). Academics throughout the 20th century argued that labor unions would have to develop international strategies moving forward, as that would match the developments of capitalism (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015).

The nature of labor unionism indeed changed drastically as labor became more globalized from the economic liberalizations implemented towards the end of the 20th century. However, this period of privatization, marketization, liberalization, deregulation, and low state spending (Gall, Hurd, & Wilkinson, 2011), created an environment which was hostile to organized labor, and did not result in concrete international strategies as academics had hoped for throughout the 20th century. Pochet and Vandaele (2017) – situating their discussion in the context of the European Trade Union Confederation, argue that the transnational capacities of unions are crucial in a globalized world, with its interwoven social and economic relations. Many national labor unions have attempted to expand their scope and operationalizations as watchdogs of labor related issues in this expanded world. They have, however, faced great difficulties in attempting this (Brecher, Costello, & Smith, 2006).

Given how labor unions have had a historically important role as transnational actors, but how their membership is declining, and how they have struggled to navigate internationally with the changed labor landscape towards the end of the 20th century, I here attempt to reintroduce them as important transnational actors to address the utility of their capacities. Labor unions – once thought of as protectors of members' rights in the market economy, are now to a greater extent studied as dynamic social, economic, cultural and political actors with multiple roles, extending beyond their traditional ones (Rosenfeld, 2019). Guided by a similar ontology, I here wonder if labor unions today, despite their seemingly weakened position in society, have capacities to fulfil their intended role as actors on the international stage in a globalized world, so to combat inequality, oligarchical tendencies, and unjust working and living conditions across national borders.

1.1 Problem Statement and Operationalization

To address the international aspects of labor unionism, I ask:

1. How do national labor unions function as transnational actors?

This thesis is a macro-level study where I explore low-level (nationally or locally) based labor unions who – despite their initial location within certain nations and regions, appear to operate as transnational actors. To answer the research question posed above, I have sampled 28 labor unions from geographically North-western regions, specifically, the United States, Canada, and the British Isles. I have used three sources of data from the sampled units: Mission statements and similar official documents such as guiding principles, objectives, rules and constitutions, and pamphlets; solidarity statements; and email communication with representatives from my sampled labor unions. I will also use the Indian farmers’ movement as an illustrative case of transnational labor union activities.

The Indian farmers’ movement began in September of 2020, when three new farming-related bills were hastily passed by the Indian government. Some argue that these farming bills will give greater power to corporations (Varghese, 2020), and make poor farmers of India more vulnerable to market forces. The timing of the implemented bills has also been questioned, as PSAC (2020) in its solidarity statement argues that the farming bills were passed hastily “at a time when restrictions around the COVID-19 pandemic prevented all forms of meetings, discussions and protests on these legislative initiatives.” The implementation of these new farming-related bills sparked outrage among farming communities across India, with both domestic labor unions across sectors and international civil societies, political figures, and unions, expressing their solidarity with the Indian farm workers. Among those vocal actors are the 28 labor unions which I have sampled for this study.

As this is an ongoing movement, I merely present a snapshot of a larger, much more complex, picture. This illustrative case, nonetheless, serves as a playing field where I attempt to grasp at nationally situated labor unions’ operations and where the findings from said case are drawn on to further discuss general tendencies of transnational unionism. Through the process of addressing the research question posed above, and using the Indian farmers’ movement as an illustrative case of union transnationalism, I want to investigate what characterizes labor unions’ transnational activities, and what possibilities or constraints labor unions face within the international world.

1.2 Thesis Outline

I have briefly introduced the topic, problem statement and question which will be explored, and how it will be answered. The following Chapter 2 on *Background and Theory*

firstly outlines the global economic landscape of today and situates labor unions within this context. Section 2.1 is a necessary background to understand how labor unions do not only operate on the national or local level, but also on the international level, which is guided by a set of neoliberal ideas. Section 2.2 of this chapter explores labor unions theoretically. I will here describe what labor unions *are*, what they *do*, what their *structure* looks like, what *solidarity* means in a labor unions context, and finally what *issues* labor unions face internationally. I will be discussing labor unions from disciplines within sociology, such as organizational theory, social movement study, and from multidisciplinary fields such as Industrial Relations.

Chapter 3 *Method* outlines my methodology, where I briefly set the scene of my thought processes, and method, where I present my sampling techniques. I also discuss two limitations relating to my study here, before I finally proceed to Chapter 4 *Data*. In this descriptive Chapter 4, I begin by shortly presenting the elements of interest to this thesis from the Indian farmers' movement, followed by a description of the 28 sampled labor unions. I, furthermore, delve into three sources of data which I have collected: Mission statements and similar official documents such as guiding principles, objectives, rules and constitutions, and pamphlets; solidarity statements; and email communication with representatives from my sampled labor unions.

To understand the data from Chapter 4, the following Chapter 5 *Analysis* revisits the research question I asked in section 1.1 on how national labor unions function as transnational actors. To answer this, I firstly outline what type of organizations the sampled labor unions are; their structure; and what they generally claim to do. Section 5.1 relates to what unions do in the Indian farmers' movement context; what their structure and motivations are; what type(s) of solidarity can be seen by the sampled unions in the movement; and finally, what they do *not* do in this particular context. Section 5.2 relates to potential issues and possibilities which labor unions face in the international world – using the analysis from Section 5.1 *Unions as Transnational Actors*, and examples from Chapter 4 *Data*, to address and discuss the potential issues and possibilities that can be seen.

Chapter 6 is a discussion chapter where I, in section 6.1, expand on notions from Chapter 5 and problematize further the typologies and potential conclusion drawn in Chapter 5. Section 6.2 *Moving Forward*, draws points from Chapter 5 and 6, and attempts to visualize and propose what labor unions can do better moving forward. I also assess what potentials this study has moving forward. Chapter 7 finally concludes this thesis.

2. Background and Theory

2.1 Background: The Neoliberal Landscape

Labor unions today operate in, what I will call, the neoliberal landscape. It encompasses a set of policy logics where the guiding principles are privatization, marketization, liberalization, deregulation, and low state spending (Gall, Hurd, & Wilkinson, 2011). It is a form of economic governance (Lambert, 2002), where neoliberal ideas permeate all aspects of the social life. It is a globalized economic system (Bieler, Hilary, & Lindberg, 2014), where transnational actors may differ in their local scope of operations, but where they still operate under a somewhat universal economic logic. The neoliberal landscape is, hence, composed of several formulations, and the point of presenting a neoliberal landscape in this manner is to outline the neoliberal essence which affects labor union operations.

The neoliberal landscape has driven, what André in the foreword to Visser (2019) calls, “the transformative change in the world of work” (p. 5), or what Herod (2020) calls the changed “political environment within which workers seek to pursue their goals” (p. 74). Both statements encompass changes which were brought about by a liberalized globalization implemented in the 1980s and 1990s. Those changes created vulnerabilities for working people, globally, and shifted power into the hands of capital (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011b). Gall, Hurd, and Wilkinson (2011) argue that neoliberalism can be viewed as dangerous and destructive from a labor union’s standpoint because it is structured to shift power and wealth into the hands of the existing ruling political and economic elites. It means that labor unions operate in a landscape which is rather hostile to organized labor, as it in many ways is the antithesis of the guiding principles within the neoliberal landscape.

Labor unions act as vessels of social counterforces to the neoliberal landscape, and they should therefore engage in controversial, or heated, topics in society, and actively oppose the dominating logic (Hyman, 2011). But action is a precondition to structure and vice versa because agents and structures are deeply connected. From the theoretical approach *political opportunities* found in social movement theory, political structures shape “the potential opportunities for [social movements] to achieve their objectives” (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013, p. 758). The extent to which labor unions can actively oppose dominant neoliberal logics will, hence, depend on the political structure of their particular context. Any behavior from an actor, whether it be one person or a labor union, will make sense to its own context.

Whichever actions actors are involved in is influenced by the particularities of that said actor and the particularities of that said time and place.

The global economy is, as outlined in this section, regarded as highly complex, where global relations are interwoven into practices and norms. All countries are actors in the international economy, and therefore also depend on each other. It is within this interdependency that labor unions have the possibility to cooperate transnationally. Labor unions – who most often have opposing interests than the neoliberal logic outlined above, still must operate within this landscape which ultimately influences their capacities to work for social change, and to achieve their goals and interests. I will return to this landscape in Chapter 5 and 6 as it relates to how labor unions function as transnational actors.

2.2 Theory: Labor Unions

2.2.1 What Unions Are

Labor unions are any association of employees or of employees' associations whose purpose is to safeguard the interests of employees vis-à-vis their employers (arbeidstvistloven, 2012, §1c). Unions are economic and political actors (Rosenfeld, 2019), and they are highly diverse. Some are, for instance, positively aligned with the neoliberal systems' ideology outlined in section 2.1, while some oppose it (Gall, Hurd, & Wilkinson, 2011). Because even though the neoliberal landscape is *hostile to organized labor*, it still holds certain opportunities for certain workers. This is simply because workers are diverse in areas such as, but not exclusive to, income, class, race, abilities, or gender. Pencavel (2007) argues that unions do not have the ability to represent all labor, and gives examples of how “unions tend to oppose free trade, to support the direction and ownership of industry by government, to champion statutory minimum wage regulation, and to side with expansionary macroeconomic policies” (p. 89), which Pencavel (2007) argues sets up groups of workers against each other, because one will gain and the other will not. Workers do not automatically share the same interests simply because they are workers.

The ILWU, on the other hand, argues that labor *unity* is key for building a strong labor union. In point three of their ten guiding principles, they argue that “[a]ny division among the workers can help no one but the employers” (ILWU, n.d.). Even though ILWUs statement, as opposed to Pencavel's (2007) broader examples, relates to the employer-employee relationship, it still depicts unity in labor union language. Union representation can be

somewhat of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, unity is key for labor power, and on the other hand, workers' interests may differ significantly. Sometimes, it is even the bureaucracy of unions – the internal body of people with political and material interests, which may differ significantly from the interests of the unions' members (Wallerstein, 2012).

Labor unions are a type of social movement organization (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013), but they still differ from typical social movement groups, e.g., environmental organizations, in that they have a human- and member-centered objective. Members make up the meaning and power of the union and the union in return gives services to its members. However, labor oriented social movement organizing is not only found within labor unions. There are other forms of social movements where people organize informally but as if in a union (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011a). Labor unions will often oppose social movement organizing of that kind because they will claim that such groupings cannot have “internal accountability” (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011a, p. 10). However, for labor unions to successfully fight discrimination, oppression, and inequality, they must cooperate with other social movements (Hyman, 2011).

Labor unions are transnational actors because they participate in and influence internationally. Risse (2007) describes two notions which define types of transnational actors: Their internal structures, and their different motivations for international involvement. In the former case, the labor unions I have gathered information on are transnational actors with looser network connections. This means that their transnational involvement is informal and spontaneous (Risse, 2007). Labor unions have varying motivations, but all have an instrumental goal of seeking prosperity for the union and serving their members. Motivations for international involvement can also be influenced by internal ideological convictions relating to what is viewed as normatively good (Risse, 2007).

Labor unions can build and expand relations, creating transnational advocacy networks. Transnational advocacy networks encompass any type of organized international relationship and are made up of actors “who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck & Sikkink, 2014, p. 2). The main strategy used by transnational advocacy networks when building and maintaining their relationships is information sharing, and networks will foster grounds of influence so that actors otherwise not thought of as actors of influence, may become impactful. Keck and Sikkink (2014) furthermore argue that a lasting motivation for having strong transnational advocacy networks extends beyond an entity's own expected gains, also including certain standards, which makes the formation and possibility to sustain transnational advocacy networks value-driven. These advocacy networks comprised of various actors are – rather

than being guided by one common goal, more likely to transform the state of the matter itself. Because of their pluralist demeanor, these networks are even “helping to transform the practice of national sovereignty” (Keck & Sikkink, 2014, p. 2).

According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), organizations must continuously make internal changes so to match the ideas of what organizational work means in the society they are operating in. Organizations that make changes to match societal ideas of what they are, it is argued, will gain legitimacy, and stay relevant. Following this line of argument, labor unions will internalize certain ideas about them and their activities which are formed in the society they operate within. From an organizational point of view, labor unions must not only be accountable to their membership, but their actions must also make sense to society. It may therefore be argued that the roles that labor unions take on will depend on what prevailing ideas or trends are found in society. The complex relational and institutionalized settings which labor unions operate within, essentially blurs the lines of their roles (what they are) and as I will show in the next section, also what they do.

2.2.2 What Unions Do

Pencavel (2007) discusses three ways that labor unions operate: through collective bargaining, through relations with employers, and in various internal union activities. Collective bargaining mostly includes negotiating wages, but can also include activities such as advocating for improved working conditions, working hours, workers’ protections, and similar work related issues. These factors play out differently and can be influenced by, for instance, workers’ own skill-levels. As an example, the bargaining power for lower skilled workers falls, but increases for higher skilled workers, in some globalized contexts (Dumont, Rayp, & Willemé, 2012).

Unions do not just protect workers’ interests in a relationship with employers, but they also foster learning which translates into bigger social movements (Forrester, 2010). Labor unions are important in educating their members (Seeliger, 2019), not only in terms of concrete economy-related aspects, but also on factors outside of the traditionally intended scope of unions, such as that of educating about political injustices (Forrester, 2010). Educational tools for union members facilitate common ground and can foster common capacity and power. On the international arena, labor unions – who face a harsher political climate within their own countries, may gain union education and support from external inputs (Forrester, 2010). Some scholars argue that labor unions foster participation in

elections and other democratic instances (Baccaro, Benassi, & Meardi, 2019), because these can sometimes be the only source of education on topics such as “understanding of, and participation in, collective activities against social, economic, and political injustices.” (Forrester, 2010, p. 143). Labor unions, hence, foster internal education for its own members, but also educate externally within their communities, their nation, and internationally.

Mundlak (2020) identifies two logics of labor association – internal and external union activities. Internal union activities may involve workers fighting together for their rights, whilst external union activities may address matters such as negotiations with other associations or state officials. Unions, therefore, do not only affect workers and workplaces, but also governments. They may do so by for instance “forming alliances with political parties” (Pencavel, 2007, p. 439) and communicating internally to members about political party endorsements. Labor unions have numbers; therefore, they can pressure toward governments (Pencavel, 2007). Labor unions do not measure in material and executive power as compared to nation states, however their influence can be highly impactful because they have the capacity to create normative direction in their immediate and broader society (Mundlak, 2020).

Rosetti (2019) argues that the purpose of labor unions is “to serve the interests of their members and to promote a more egalitarian social model in society as a whole” (p. 1). The former means to represent its members in direct labor related instances, as outlined above, while the latter concerns the translation of internal values and beliefs of the union to other parts of society. But the level of success at which an internal value system can be translated out to broader society may depend on exogenous and endogenous reasons alike. It may be factors such as “national legacies, the institutional context, as well as [unions’] own strategic choices” (Ibsen & Tapia, 2017, p. 171).

According to the sampled labor union GMB (2019), labor operations can be focused on regulating relations at work, providing benefits of various kinds to members, promoting members’ interests in political instances of influence, achieving equity within the union, workplace, and society as large. The purpose for the individual who is organized in a labor union, then, concerns having access to the points listed by GMB, but a purpose may also be to have a vessel to facilitate deeper concepts of life such as “equality, emancipation and dignity.” (Mundlak, 2020, p. 1). According to Meyer and Rowan (1977), some activities and processes within organizations can “come to take on a rulelike status in social thought and action” (p. 341). For labor unions, looking out for members’ interests is the most

institutionalized structure of union activity, and it has a rullelike status. It is indeed what defines an organization as a labor union.

2.2.3 Union Structures

The role of unions has historically been to operate as actors of collective bargaining within nations at a sectoral and intersectoral level (Hyman, 2011). Unions are largely nationally situated, both considering their members, as well as the scope and capacities for operations (Gumbrell-McCormick, & Hyman, 2015). Some unions are state run while others are supported with resources from other actors, and each structure pose their own set of possibilities and complications (Herod, 2020). There may, for instance, be underlying demands and expectations to the labor union depending on the way it is funded, and there may be conflicts of interests. Labor unions can be state or non-state actors depending on their funding affiliations. The important point here is that labor unions are always guided by someone's interests. Ideally, it would be their members' interests, but it is guided by, among other things, funding.

Baccaro, Benassi, and Meardi (2019) argue that it is difficult to draw general conclusions on the forms of internal democracy of labor unions, because there will always be a difference between the formal structure of an organization and its actual day-to-day activities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). However, there are some overarching similarities among unions. Labor unions are, at least in theory, constructed to operate with a democratic vision. The idea is that members are the ones who decide the fate and agendas of the union because – without members, there is no labor union. But labor unions must also be able to operate hierarchically, especially under periods of distress such as a strike. Unions cannot have diverse opinions during such periods because that may distract from the cause, as this fifth guiding principle of the ILWU states:

Any union, if it is to fulfill its appointed task, must put aside all internal differences and issues to combine for the common cause of advancing the welfare of the membership. No union can successfully fulfill its purpose in life if it allows itself to be distracted by any issue which causes division in its ranks and undermines the unity which all labor must have in the face of the employer. (ILWU, n.d.)

Labor unions must in times of distress, according to the principle above, have unity and not diverge from the intended cause. Stewards are, as an example, educated to inspire and hold long strikes, and to unify workers along the way. Furthermore, union leaders must also have gained trust from the members during peaceful times, so that they are internally viewed as accountable for the executive actions they may take during times of distress.

Labor unions need money and other resources which they can use during times of distress, such as paying wages for their members during strikes. Resources are gained during peaceful times by means such as membership fees or donations, and many labor unions have thorough rules and special financial committees to regulate such resources. Successful labor unions build themselves up and their capacities in times of peace, and successful unions have a great deal of internal flexibility (Baccaro, Benassi, & Meardi, 2019). During times of distress, labor unions must be viewed as capable of succeeding to deliver on their threats, e.g. a strike. The point of striking is to show power behind the demands – that the union is capable to sustain its membership.

As outlines above, even though labor unions are democratic, grassroots, and member-led, they are also organizations which can be thought of as having an authoritative leadership. Such leadership is thought to use its executive power in internal decision-making, because the leadership has deep knowledge and understanding about the goals and meaning of the union. A leadership will most likely know what necessary actions must be taken internally (Røvik, 2007); however, scholarship differs on the level of importance labor union leadership holds vis-à-vis labor union members (Baccaro, Benassi, & Meardi, 2019, p. 8-10). Labor unions are, in this sense, both grassroot based, but also consist of an authoritative leadership. They must operate as both democracies (bottom-up) and as hierarchies (top-down). Labor unions must in times of peace have built loyalty with their members, so that they can exercise centralistic leadership during times of distress. This is how unions can glide between their democratic and hierarchic role.

Rosetti (2019) presents four different dimensions within which labor unions tend to achieve their objectives in. The first being the *structural* dimension, which concerns workers' skills and positions within the production. The *associational* aspect refers to the power in a large union base and the *organizational* dimension refers to the organizing abilities of unions. These two may, for instance, concern union affiliations which can exceed both sectors and borders. The final, *institutional*, dimension of union power concerns the relationship with the state and the legislative level. Union activities fluctuate between these various dimensions. In the institutional dimension, labor unions can be met with support and equal grounds for their

objectives, or there can be clashing interests where unions struggle to bridge their members' interests with institutional interests.

International union operations have throughout history been structured in two ways. They have formed sector-related global organizations, and they have formed “associations of national union centers” (Herod, 2020, p. 71). Unions have historically had international engagement, but these have more often been organized in direct solidary actions, and not been based on internal strategies for transnational engagement of the unions themselves (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015).

Throughout the early formative days, labor unions' internationalism became *ornamental*, as union internationalism always was secondary to union's own members within own nations (Wallerstein, 2012). This ornamental tendency is connected to what Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue are institutional myths. Such myths may, for instance, be actions or services which organizations adopt ceremonially within their structure to appear like they are conforming to the institutional rule. In such cases, there will be a gap between what organizations, labor unions in my argument, present to be their internal structure versus what their actions look like empirically.

Labor unions also operate with different ideological convictions. Forrester (2010) gives examples of how eastern European situated unions were supporting the capitalist system by educating employees about their responsibilities as workers within the capitalist system, while Brazilian unions conversely, organized and educated their members in an anti-neoliberal culture. Ideological motivations therefore relate to temporally defining aspects of unionism. States' own history, institutions, and structure affect what labor associations look like in any given country. Likewise do the norms and practices of unions affect the unionism landscape (Mundlak, 2020).

Whichever inner logic labor unions decide to operate upon will translate outward to other levels of their society (Mundlak, 2020). Some labor unions may, as an example, decide to operate with peaceful strategies, while some will choose conflictual ones. Some will compromise, and some will not. Labor unions foster resistance but also coordination, simultaneously, making the operating role of unions contradictory. They may oppose economic state/capital policies/behavior while also adjusting according to these (Forrester, 2010).

Labor unions may have differing concerns and views, and internationally volatile labor struggles may position labor unions in opposition of each other. This is to say that labor unions do not operate the international labor landscape with homogenic reasoning (Furåker &

Larsson, 2020). Just because we live in a globalized capitalist system with highly interconnected labor relations does not mean that each class categorization has similar struggles or interests.

2.2.4 Solidarity

The word *solidarity* is used and understood differently depending on the context of the solidary action. Its meaning for this thesis is adopted by Scholz' (2008) conceptualizations of political solidarity. This type of solidarity unifies participants of a movement over a case of oppression or injustice that someone experiences. Political solidarity consists of several actions. It means working to change the conditions which cause the injustice, and more immediately, it means helping where needed those who are subjected to injustices (Scholz, 2008). The one committed to political solidarity is positioned "in relation with others similarly committed and in opposition to at least some others in society" (Scholz, 2008, p. 53). It relates to Laitinen and Pessi's (2014) solidarity dimension, which they call *fighting solidarity* (p. 10), and they suggest that this form of solidarity requires an enemy. Political solidarity is generated by notions of oppression, and therefore relates to a Marxist dual conception of class-struggle where someone is oppressed because someone is the oppressor (Ollman, 1968).

There are different motivations for solidarity. Ideological conviction, as an example, is one aspect which guides the meaning of solidarity. Socialist unions and neoliberal unions will, for instance, have completely different meanings of solidarity Hyman (2011). Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2015) furthermore discuss solidarity *with* and solidarity *against*. Some interpretations of this *with-against* distinction differ (see Furåker & Larsson, 2020), however I am using an expanded interpretation of Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman's (2015) discussions on the difference between them. That is, I am not focusing actors, but rather on what cause of solidarity actors stand *with* or *against*. One being more avoidant and the other being a more conflictual form of solidarity. A solidary action can also be motivated by morals, for instance the feeling of duty (Scholz, 2008). A labor union operating in a democratic context with freedoms larger than a group experiencing injustice or oppression elsewhere, may feel like it is their duty to speak out on the oppressed groups' cause, because they can, while the group who is experiencing injustice cannot in the same way (Scholz, 2008).

Interests in political solidarity actions are not only found in structures or actors – actors, as I have discussed them in an organizational sense. Individuals united in labor unions with their own particularities also play a role in establishing and expanding unions’ solidary motivations. An individual may, for instance, hold intrinsic awareness of certain injustices because they have some sort of connection to, or can recognize, that injustice (Scholz, 2008). An individuals’ motivations for solidarity are very personal, but motivations can be: “Anger, hope, sympathy, pity, fear, self-confidence, self-interest, friendship, and countless other feelings may contribute, as might a host of other intellectual factors, arguments, experiences, or perspectives” (Scholz, 2008, p. 51). The individual will feed the organization with its particularities, which in turn will feed the solidary action. The solidary action is, ultimately, the sum of an organization’s parts. Uniting against a cause of injustice or oppression is therefore empowering for all involved (Scholz, 2008).

The strength or weakness of political solidarity depend on a various set of factors. Political solidarity can, for instance, be considered weak when one is invested in slight activism and resistance but does not devote deeper. Political solidarity is, on the contrary, strong when there is substantial self-reflection of one’s own positionality and relationships to others within the social structures where injustice and oppression is found. It is an active commitment to changing those structures, and requires the solidary actions to be impactful and consistent (Scholz, 2008). It must be noted that Scholz (2008) does not put normative meaning to this spectrum of strong and weak political solidarity, yet it is nonetheless contestable. An initially weak political solidary action may turn out to be strong, and vice versa. Even the weakest of political solidarities, such as virtue-signaling, may still be impactful depending on who mediates the solidary actions and in what context.

Hyman (2011) describes types of solidarity as being based on identity; on common interests; and mutuality despite difference. The *identity-based* solidarity may regard notions of labor occupation, such as being a farmer, or sharing a common religion. The *common interests*-based solidarity may concern unification over certain causes, such as seeking to repeal unwanted laws, or pursuing higher wages. The final type of solidarity, *mutuality despite difference*, relates to ideas of interdependence. In a labor organizational sense, it can relate to Wooten and Hoffman’s (2008) discussions on interorganizational relations (p. 56). It concerns the activities of two or more organizations who may, for instance, have differing objectives, but who still work together in achieving certain tasks.

Transnational solidarity relates to the *mutuality despite difference* type of solidarity where the argument “is that the interests shared between workers in different countries can be

made to outweigh their differences” (Bieler, Hilary, & Lindberg, 2014, p. 7). It means that labor union internationalism is possible insofar as differences are set aside. Solidary actions are very context specific and solidary commitments range spatially and in scope (Scholz, 2008). Labor unions’ internal capacities, and their understanding of urgency over the cause they advocate, will determine how they go about their transnational solidary action.

However, empirically speaking, “solidary is more straightforward and more practical to organize at sectoral level” (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015, p. 4). This means that transnational solidary actions are not necessarily empirically practiced. As mentioned in section 2.2.3 on union internationalism becoming ornamental; political solidarity may likewise be ornamental, where the objective of the solidary action is lost to the nominal cause. However, instances of transnational solidarity do exist to varying degrees. Unions within nations of Europe, as an example, are more likely to show solidarity with unions in the South, than they are supranationally within Europe itself (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015).

Intersectoral or even transnational solidarity between labor unions does not happen automatically and is not of a static nature (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011a). Furthermore, labor unions cannot simply choose whichever transnational solidarity strategy they want, because it will always be influenced by exogenous factors, such as conditions of the neoliberal landscape, and endogenous factors such as a unions’ own capacities (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011a). *Mutuality despite difference* is also not as straightforward. Workers may share interests or struggles, however, in the international economic system they may also be “forced into direct competition with one another as a result of trade liberalization” (Bieler, Hilary, & Lindberg, 2014, p. 7). Labor unions’ capacities to bridge workers relations for solidarity and political and economic power should, conclusively, be assessed and analyzed in whichever context and time the labor unions operate in.

2.2.5 Issues with Labor Union Internationalism

Throughout the years, unions have built capacities to serve as important socio-economic actors within nations, but there are still great challenges unions face internationally (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015). International labor unionism exists, but is most developed and common between European countries (Ciampani & Tilly, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015). When addressing the economic crisis of 2007-2008 within Europe, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2015) argue that labor unions engaged little in transnational efforts. Cumbers, Nativel, and Routledge (2008) furthermore argue that labor

unions struggle to balance tensions of local and national interests versus the implementation of a more international union scope. Domestic interests can sometimes differ completely from international agendas, and the priority of domestic unions is primarily its domestic context.

The financial aspect of unions is another issue which unions face in international union operations. It has a lot to say on the willingness and capacities for transnational solidarity, as Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman (2015) put it: “National unions, in most cases struggling with reduced finances, remain reluctant to fund effective international organisations” (p. 12). In an already economically pressed situation, labor unions will always pick to fight causes which relate to their immediate surroundings. Challenges can also be more straightforward and involve things such as different languages or difference in union structure which can hinder transnational union cooperation (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015).

As discussed in section 2.2.1, labor unions are highly diverse, and so are workers. If organizing on a local level is difficult because of internal disagreements, or external relations, then international labor unionism adds another layer of complexity to unions’ organizing abilities. As Gordon and Turner (2000) discussed difficulties in successful transnational union collaboration: “from differences in union structure, ideology, and culture to conflicting interests and differing levels of economic development” (p. 256), all of which may hinder successful labor union internationalism.

Gordon and Turner (2000) argued that labor unions’ international work was not extensive enough in meeting the pending needs in the global economy. They suggested that unions needed to establish more transnational relations with multinational corporations, and with national and local activist groups and unions. A successful labor union collaboration, they argued, had to build a broad transnational network within which labor unions would have contact with key actors. Gallin (2002) furthermore argued that labor unions have bigger potential to organize in a substantial way, and – although labor unions still have many difficulties representing their workers in our (neoliberal) globalized world (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011a), Bieler, Hilary, and Lindberg (2014) still argue that we are beginning to see more transnational coordination among workers in the global economic landscape.

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodology

I begin with methodology, which is “a study of the principles and theories which guide the choice of method” (Burnham et al., 2008, p. 4). My research follows an inductive logic of reasoning, beginning with specific instances and observations to generate theories. I have been guided by the iterative principle of grounded theory, where data collection and analysis happen simultaneously (Charmaz, 1996). I have conducted qualitative research to be able to describe the phenomena of transnational unionism and identify typologies and processes of such operations. In this way, it informs the bigger curiosity of this topic, namely that of the relevance of labor unions in our globally entangled economy. My broad research question has been a guiding point throughout exploring this topic, and I have sought to follow grand themes, rather than specific outliers. This has primarily been chosen because there is a blind spot in my study field, International Relations, on labor unions as transnational actors. A lacking scholarship on the topic (Cotton & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2012), inspired me to follow a pragmatic approach and a broader descriptive pathway. I will come back to these research-related thoughts in Chapter 6.

This is a pragmatic thesis, where the focus has been to choose strategies as they come along the way (Creswell, 2007). The epistemological approach in this thesis is an interpretive approach (Nygaard, 2017), where I have been guided by what has been presented to me, and where *truth* has been “what works at the time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). I have not viewed concepts in a particular manner, but have rather been persuaded that what I am being told is what is real. This also relates to the background and theoretical implications from the previous chapter. Chapter 2 has been written alongside researching the sampled units. The neoliberal landscape is an example of this, because the topic of neoliberalism showcases itself throughout data sources from labor unions, therefore becoming obvious that it was a concept of importance. A pragmatist approach has been particularly fitting for this research, as the research question itself is not so much normatively loaded. I have not problematized labor unions’ transnational operations, and I never researched study units in depth, but simply asked what these operations look like.

The thesis is descriptive, up until some parts of Chapter 5 and especially Chapter 6, where I discuss more normatively the implications of what I have found throughout my study. My ontology is pluralist, in that it does not side with either objectivism or constructivism

(Bryman, 2016, p. 29-31), and as mentioned in the opening chapter of this thesis, I am guided by Rosenfeld's (2019) discussions on treating labor unions as highly dynamic social, economic, cultural, and political actors who inhabit multiple roles in society.

3.2 Methods of Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis

I have used a purposive sampling approach (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 18), and the following sampling strategies: *Criterion sampling*, which is based on labor unions having explicitly declared statements of solidarity for the Indian farmer context. And *opportunistic sampling*, meaning that I have taken any opportunity to sample actors of interest as they have responded back to me or that I have gained access to documents. I selected 28 labor unions as my sample size because adding more samples was not helping to establish new theoretical categories. I had, therefore, achieved saturation in my study (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 18). The way I have known if an organization is a labor union has been based on their self-identification, which ultimately goes back to my pragmatist approach. As Chapter 4 will show, there are some labor unions, HEAL as an example, who can equally be classified as other types of organizations.

The Indian farmers' movement is only briefly outlined in Chapter 4.1, using various news sources and scholarly contributions. As with any source, I approach these news outlets and with caution and skepticism. They are, nonetheless, sources which give more insight to the spirit of the movement, rather than if I had used only official statements. Although, as I have stated previously, the truth *is* what the labor unions have told me is true about the movement. Also, as Bergström and Boréus (2005) argue; an ideology cannot be reconstructed only by analyzing the visibly manifested surface (p. 158). That is why I am presenting the neoliberal landscape in Chapter 2.1, so that the mission statements, solidarity statements, and interviews can be understood with it as backdrop.

My data collection process began with reading labor unions' solidarity statements, and from there identifying common themes and key words and concepts which they used, such as *solidarity*, *neoliberalism*, or anything about labor union *internationalism*. That is, I followed the principles of grounded theory which are "to let the key issues emerge rather than to force them into preconceived categories" (Charmaz, 1996, p. 47). Since the italicized words have normative implications to them, I chose to include mission statements and similar documents from labor unions who explicitly expressed or co-signed statements of solidarity with the Indian farmers' movement, so to fully grasp at their internal logics and operations.

Finally, email correspondence has been used as an unofficial and personal source of

data (interviews or just personal exchanges with actors of these unions) to combine with the two other more official data sources: solidarity statements and mission statements. My email interviews unfolded in such a way that the likelihood of risks to the interview subjects was minimal. The email interviews have taken place through my university email, under the email software programs' internal correspondence category, which otherwise has four sensitivity categories: public, internal, confidential, and highly confidential. I used the internal category. Had I, however, managed to have in-depth interviews, I would have used the highest confidentiality category, or more likely moved to a different platform for confidentiality reasons.

Furthermore, I sought to avoid writing my emails with normative or loaded sentences (see appendix 1), essentially to practice self-reflexivity (Bryman, 2016, p. 388). Even though my individual participants were not asked personal questions, the reason why I chose a fixed email template was still to avoid a reactive effect from them, which "is deemed to result in untypical behaviour" (Bryman, 2016, p. 695). I contacted all 28 unions who had expressed solidarity with the Indian farmers' movement case, however only 8 out of 28 unions answered, which means that 20 unions did not answer. This non-response affects my ability to draw solid conclusions from email correspondences.

Before describing my analytical method, I want to quickly outline my coding method, which consisted of identifying reoccurring themes in all three data sources. The coded and dissected data can be found in a document on my computer and uploaded to my cloud which only I have access to. I gathered all important material in a separate document and fragmented everything into categories, but being careful not to mix sources, e.g., mixing information from solidarity statements with those of *About* pages, or similar.

I have used qualitative document analysis, as a method of understanding my data, and this research is comprised of multiple data sources, such as official documents from official actors and official documents from private sources (Bryman, 2016, p 552-553). This activity has been iterative, guided by labor unions' own meanings and words. Interpretations within text analysis is, however, a question of reliability (Bergström & Boréus, 2005, p. 35), because even though most of my data sources have been official documents – seemingly difficult to misinterpret, I still acknowledge that all observations are marinated in theory.

The content in any given text relates to whoever the messenger is and how the document should be interpreted (Bergström & Boréus, 2005). A statement must therefore not necessarily mean what I interpret it to mean, because interpretations relate to the landscape they operate within. It must also be noted that I, during this study, am both a participant and

an interpreter (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 2). I am not only the recipient of the information in the texts I am analyzing, but I am also an analyzer of the *sender*. I am not the primary recipient, but I do not play an objective role, as I am also an interpreter of the *data*. Any interpretations will therefore be colored by my presence of reading (Bergström & Boréus, 2005).

There are various criteria for how to evaluate the trustworthiness of my study (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 17), beginning with triangulation which, according to Lune and Berg (2017, Ch. 1), is the use of several techniques of research for a study. I have triangulated using my multiple data sources, so to assess my own ability of understanding what I have been reading and to come closer to a truer form of reality which I am describing. The second criterion for trustworthiness concerns the technique of thick description, which means describing in a detailed manner to the reader from the sampled data (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 17).

In my chapter on data, I present some numbers, but also use words such as *some*, *a few*, or *many* when describing how many things, times, or ways, something occurs, followed by concrete examples or quotes from the study units. The use of these italicized words has been intentional, as I can never be completely sure of the actual number of the occurrences I am describing. As an example, not every sampled labor union explicitly express that they work for better working conditions, or that they have a transnational agenda. But these things become obvious facts when reading into the various contexts and documents. In such examples, I also dare to use *all*, to describe that indeed all do or behave in a certain way.

3.2.1 Additional Remarks

Although I am drawing examples of unions' transnational capacities from the 28 sampled labor unions, these actors should not be understood to individually represent what I discuss and conclude in Chapter 5 and 6. The focus of this thesis is not on any one individual, or organization, but rather on the concepts which arise from being the particular actors that the samples are. A dimension of in this instance may be the fairness aspect under authenticity (Bryman, 2016, p. 386), and it is about the fair representation of the topic and actors explored. Also – because I am essentially using the sampled labor unions as representative of the research question that I am asking, I do not want to breach the integrity (NESH, 2019), by jeopardizing the reputation of the unions or the transparency and willingness for future research. I am merely drawing data from them to tell a general story.

Furthermore, due to the principles of research ethics (Bryman, 2016, Ch. 6), I have not disclosed anything regarding the identities of representatives from the labor unions which I have sampled. I have had little chance to create a safe in-depth interviewing environment and

– due to the static nature of emailing, have therefore promised full anonymity to participants from the beginning (see appendix 1). Even though I have conducted interviews with representatives of official organizations, so-called elite interviewing, the ways which these representatives' information can be found online makes it safer and research ethically responsible to not disclose anything.

3.3 Limitations

There have been two main limitations to this research: Online data collection, and the Indian farmers' movement being young. Firstly, meetings online are always fundamentally more unreliable than physical meetings, in if they will give good data. In this research, digital platforms have been both good and bad in terms of accessing more informal data. Good, in that virtual rooms facilitate fast communication, however, bad because it has been challenging to obtain email responses from labor unions. Table 1 on advantages and disadvantages by Fritz and Vandermause (2018, p. 1642) nicely summarize my own experience with email interviewing. The notion that none of my communication was location bound was probably the biggest advantage of this study. By setting up email interviews, I was able to communicate with representatives with whom I do not share a close time-zone with. Receiving all emails in the middle of my night made it evident that I had chosen the correct interviewing method.

It must be noted that I, when having gathered and analyzed my data, most likely have not managed to capture correct snapshots of individual cases of transnational union solidarity as communicated by representatives of labor unions. Furthermore, life on the internet cannot be identified and defined easily (Burnham et al., 2008), however there is reason to believe that transnational union solidarity, to a great extent, exists in informal online and offline rooms. Such virtual rooms are completely excluded within this study.

Furthermore, there have been limitations regarding the Indian farmers' movement case. For the duration of my data collection, I found very few adequate sources of nuanced information about the Indian farmers' movement. I have therefore sought to seek out peoples' and organizations' own words about the movement they are a part of. Most of the Indian farmers, activists, and unions relevant in the case have mobilized in social media outlets – specifically Twitter and Facebook, and most texts in these social media outlets have been written in Hindi and Devanagari script. Although the Google translate system has been a great help in such cases, it is likely that this language and script barrier has influenced an

unconscious sense-making on my part where translations have not made sense to me.
Essentially, it is very likely that I have drawn clumsy conclusions from such text sections

4. Data

This chapter will present data collected within the period from March to June of 2021 from 28 sampled labor unions. As noted in the previous chapter, they were sampled using a purposive sampling approach. All labor unions are situated in a North-Western context, specifically the United States, the British Isles, and Canada, and they are operating in democracies. All are national labor unions or belong to a local branch under a national mother union.

There have been many other groups who have expressed solidarity with the Indian farmers' movement, such as educational advocacy groups, food justice groups, women's and environmental rights groups, NGO's, research groups, city councils and municipalities, political party groups, individual politicians, policy lobby groups, socialist news organizations, papers, magazines, universities and student groups, different charities, religious groups, diaspora, and celebrities. But these groups have not appeared to primarily be labor unions. It must however be noted that labor unions can serve functions of these other pluralist social groups, and vice versa. As I will discuss more in Chapter 5, not all sampled labor unions are only labor oriented.

4.1 The Indian Farmers' Movement

As mentioned, the Indian farmers' movement was chosen because of the initially vocal support from some geographically North-western situated labor unions and similar organizations. The information in this section is merely a quick snapshot of a much longer and complex situation in India, where a few pages explanation does not do the movement justice. The purpose of this section is to draw the most important descriptions of the movement which relate to my research question.

The Indian farmers' movement began in September 2020 when three new farm bills were introduced and passed by the Indian government. Given that about half of India's population sustain themselves from working in agriculture (Narayanan, 2021), these new farming bills – which will give greater power to corporations (Varghese, 2020), sparked outrage among small scale farming communities, so called *kisans*, because the bills will make the poorest farmers of India even more vulnerable to market forces. In its solidarity statement, PSAC (2020), argues that the farming bills were passed hastily “at a time when restrictions

around the COVID-19 pandemic prevented all forms of meetings, discussions and protests on these legislative initiatives.”

Even though every Indian state has its own agricultural rules, India operates on a minimum support price system which ensures stable and predictable prices. This system – although flawed, functions as a guiding principle aimed at protecting farmers to give them fair pricing (Crowley, 2020). NFU Canada (2020) argues that these “new laws will lift the ban on hoarding food by corporate buyers, which will allow them to capitalize on ups and downs in production by price-gouging consumers during shortages and depressing prices to farmers in times of abundance.” It essentially means that, as the farming bills open the Indian agricultural sector, farmers will lose the benchmark prices from the minimum support price system, leaving them in much more vulnerable positions than they already were before the new farming laws.

Scholars Cabalion and Thivet (2021) argue, in an article in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, that the farmers’ movement resembles the somewhat militaristic tendencies which has historical connections to the formation of India. *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan* which means *Hail the Soldier, Hail the Farmer*, is a political slogan used since India’s independence, and has been seen during the farmers’ movement. *Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan* is connected to ideas that the military defends the outer borders, while the farmers hold the internal security – the food sector.

The Indian farmers’ movement has organized in quite different ways compared to what traditional union organizing looks like in the geographically North-Western world, for instance seen in the scale, duration, or unrest connected to the movement. It is overall difficult to assess and analyze labor union membership within India due to lacking reliable data (Mahmood, 2016). Labor unions are still in their formative stages in developing countries, as Gupta and Gupta (2013) argue that labor unions in India are “weak, unstable, amorphous, fragmental and uncoordinated” (p. 1).

Nonetheless, the visibly active labor unions in this case are listed in appendix 3, although there are most likely many more labor unions. Many of these farmers’ unions are organized under the farmers’ union coalition Samyukt Kisan Morcha, which was formed in November of 2020 to bridge the Indian farmers movement. This coalition is in turn organized under the All India Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee, which was formed in 2017. Most of the unions listed in appendix 3 have outdated, or rarely updated, official websites. Externally, and for the general public to see, it appears that they rely heavily on social media to communicate with international actors of interest. Indian farmer unions and coalitions

mostly operate in social medias, such as Facebook or Twitter, where information travels quickly.

Most mainstream media in India barely mention the farmers' movement (Crowley, 2020), or have downplayed the farmers, sometimes portraying them as anti-nationals (Varghese, 2020). There are reports of online censorship of actors connected to the Indian farmers' movement (Garcha, 2020), and Twitter blocked around 250 accounts and tweets connected to the farmers' movement, after demands from the Indian government (Perrigo, 2021).

The research of Fougner and Kurtoğlu (2011), looking at strikers of a dialysis set factory, revealed how striking workers gained international support from external unions, organizations, and civil societies, and that these external actors were successful in bringing about real solidarity activity and change for the striking workers. Fougner and Kurtoğlu's (2011) research resembles the case of the Indian farmers and external support networks. Labor unions, organizations, civil society, Indian diasporas, and religious groups have all shown solidarity with the Indian farmers' movement. As an example, a one-page advertisement with a statement of solidarity was printed in the New York Times, paid for by the Justice for Migrant Women (2021), which featured many signatories. Furthermore, international activists and celebrities have raised awareness, among their millions of social media followers, about the cause. Highly official actors have also expressed concern regarding the treatment of the Indian farmers, such the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau who, according to Reuters, expressed his concern for the protesting farmers in India, with which the Indian foreign ministry responded very critically to (Migliani, 2020).

4.2 Sampled Labor Unions

4.2.1 Organizational Type and Union Structure

17 labor unions were sampled from Canada (see appendix 2). 8 of those are general labor unions which either operate in certain geographical regions, or for public or private but general (not specific occupation) employees. One of these general unions is the CLC which is a national meta-union, uniting other labor unions within Canada. The CLC nonetheless signifies its own agency for this thesis. The remaining 9 are specialized unions which encompass workers in particular sectors such as foods, services, farming, warehousing, steel work, postal work, education, and the health sector. These 17 Canadian labor unions represent

members ranging from the lowest number of 3,000 as reported by the USWLocal2009 (n.d.) to the highest of 3,000,000 reported by the CLC (n.d.). Although the largest membership base, if the meta-union CLC is excluded, belongs to CUPE (n.d.) with 700,000.

Nearly all Canadian labor unions define themselves as labor unions or alliances, and all are labor-oriented. But many also expand beyond this one labor categorization. The UFCW, as an example, calls itself a nonprofit organization in addition to a union, while the NFU Canada, calls itself “a dynamic grassroots farmer organization” (NFU Canada, n.d.1). The BCGEU, lastly – while having an all-labor related objectives list, appears to engage in very broad social issues. Considering that it has an international committee and is partnered with organizations across the world, the BCGEU appears to operate more like an NGO or a developmental agency rather than exclusively operating as a labor union.

All labor unions are member-centered, but some appear to equally serve their immediate community, such as the occupational field of their member base. The OSSTF, as an example, looks after its members’ interests, but also advocates broader in achieving its internal goals. The OSSTF argues that: “Although it is [our] aim to protect and enhance public education, we realize that to achieve this goal globally, we must commit to working toward social justice both within the school and society.” (OSSTF, n.d.). The AFL likewise operates as a political actor. It works in the region to make sure that good policies and legislations are in place, which benefit union activities. A vast majority of the Canadian sample has roles which engages in their respective communities through political instances; on economic justice related topics; and with social and environmental issues.

All samples appear to operate as democratic unions, but their internal structures and governance differ somewhat. The Canadian samples’ operations are found in regions, provinces, or occupational fields, and many belong to a mother union. Some are even part of international branches which appear to heavily influence their own internal operations. The USWLocal2009, as an example, is a branch of the USW, and the USW operates in Canada and North America. The USW works with the CLC, which is also partnered with industriALL, which is a global union. In theory, the USWLocal2009 partakes in and is influenced by three levels – the mother union, within the country, and globally. USWLocal2009 is allied and partnered with organizations – local or sector specific alliances and unions, and it also has partnerships with environmental organizations. NUPGE (n.d.) is another example which is made up of several independent and affiliate unions comprised of 14 different branches and entities. Members in NUPGE belong to sub-unions (more locally operating) unions which are a part of NUPGE. These various small-scale unions and

organizations are independent, but still belong to the larger collective of NUPGE. Many Canadian labor unions appear to cooperate, or are branches to, one another.

2 labor unions were sampled from the United States (see appendix 2). Both are specialized unions working the farming and food sector. The farming union, NFU U.S., is divided into regions, and operates on a local structure where their organizing policies are drafted. The union is niched towards the family farming sector in the United States, and claims to represent almost 200,000 ranchers, fishers, and family farms. The NFU U.S., much like the Canadian unions, cooperates internally among members and externally among actors in society, acting in roles of influence beyond those affecting its immediate membership.

The food chain union, HEAL, resembles a coalition or a social organization more than a traditional labor union. It was nonetheless sampled as a labor union because its self-defining elements resembles what labor unions do and stand for. HEAL claims that one of its main purposes is to strengthen collective power in the food-related system, and lists their membership base comprising of “rural and urban farmers, fisherfolk, farm and food chain workers [...]” (HEAL, n.d.). The coalition is member-led, bridging 55 organizations of various backgrounds together under one name. HEAL is, essentially, a mashup of labor related issues, but also the environment, health, the economy, and greater society. Where other unions have these aspects incorporated into their work as labor unions, HEAL on the other hand, appears to engage in all at once and in no particular order.

9 labor unions were sampled from the British Isles (see appendix 2). 5 out of the 9 are general labor unions, which either operate in certain larger or smaller geographical regions, or for public and general employees. One of these general unions is the TUC which is a national meta-union and unites 48 labor unions. The TUC, like the CLC from the Canadian context, signifies its own agency for this thesis. The remaining 4 out of the sampled 9 are specialized unions which encompass workers in sectors such as food, education, land, and the fire brigade. These 9 labor unions from the British Isles claim to represent members ranging from the lowest number of 4,623 reported by the IWGB (2020) to the highest of 5,421,895 belonging to the TUC (TUC, 2021, p. 44). Although the largest membership base, if TUC is excluded, belongs to UNISON with a count of 1,417,637 registered members (UNISON, 2021), closely followed by Unite the Union’s (2020) 1,277,491 registered members. Overall labor union membership in the United Kingdom, which excludes Ireland and various small islands as I present this collection of countries as the British Isles, equated to 6,56 million in 2020 (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2021).

The labor union sample from the British Isles have, much like the Canadian unions, pluralistic roles. The Land Workers' Alliance, for instance, views member-interests as primary, but also appears to simultaneously work on environmental causes. The FBU, as another example, works on the local, regional, and national level when campaigning on issues such as labor, health, and disarmament. And the NEU, is partnered with organizations in supporting international campaigns which involve supporting teachers and teacher unions – developing the quality of education for all, working to reduce poverty, and promoting human rights. Both the FBU and NEU therefore appear to operate as social and political pressure groups, both domestically and internationally. The international committee of UNISON has many social movement causes, and therefore UNISON also appears to hold many different operating roles.

Most of the 9 sampled labor unions from the British Isles claim to, or appear to be, democratic with a democratically elected governing body. They, however, differ somewhat in their organizational strategies. The internal logic of the FBU, as an example, is structured on a more individual approach which they argue is focused on individual members' needs, rather than following a generic membership-benefits template. Other labor unions are structured on providing certain universal services to their members, such as securing wages or offering legal aid when needed. Some labor unions, like the Land Workers' Alliance, appear to operate from an extraordinarily bottoms-up approach. All labor unions in this context are, in one way or another, affiliated with organizations or labor unions – locally, nationally, and internationally.

4.2.2 General Union Activities

All 28 sampled labor unions do various labor-related activities internally, and the majority of the 28 labor unions claim to work around improving the working conditions of their individual members. Those who do not explicitly express this are meta-unions such as the CLC or TUC. Even though they do not explicitly state this as a primary goal, it is evident from their cooperation and bridgebuilding with other unions, that they operate with this mission in mind. Many labor union objectives outline that they seek to practice collective bargaining and look to safeguard this and expand bargaining efforts. The activities which labor unions conduct in developing working conditions encompass things such as improving working hours; improving wages and pensions; fostering workplace flexibility; securing high standards of health and safety; and organizing those who are not organized. The UFCW, for

instance, works with making wages and benefits better by bargaining and uniting in numbers in the union.

Many labor unions also extend beyond the workplace in facilitating member benefits to varying degrees, which may comprise of offering members good health insurance; sick leave; vacation benefits; various discounts on goods and services; low interest rates on loans or other non-work-related benefits. The BFAWU, as an example, offers the traditional labor union membership benefits, but also offers activities such as legal services for members and their families for cases which do not have to be labor related. Member benefits can also relate to the more conventional day-to-day activities in life, such as AUPE sometimes organizes “events like curling bonspiels, Christmas parties, picnics and other social activities” (AUPE, n.d.1).

All 28 labor unions provide some form of internal education, training, or learning. However, the scope and targeted education varies a lot. The capacity for educating own members can depend on internal resources, but role-focused education also depends on the demography of the membership itself. Certain unions are niched, like for instance the NFU Canada which has members in the farming sector, specifically targeted to family farmers. NFU Canada therefore educates in ways which will benefit its members in their role as farmers (NFU Canada, n.d.2) Other unions have a broader membership demography, which does not offer the same tailored educational program. However, some labor unions offer extensive education, where not only members, but their families can complete college education through union-based scholarship programs. Some labor unions have online programs where members can find courses on unions, on political action, or convention training. And finally, some labor unions mostly educate union representatives, and not so many ordinary members.

Some labor unions also offer steward training. Stewards, or union representatives, work closely with members in their workplace to help members who have questions concerning whatever work-related, to safeguard that agreements are being held, and to resolve potential disputes in favor of workers. If there are issues stewards cannot resolve, then it goes to the next level within the union. Stewardship is a visible form of unionism, where unions show their presence by having key figures working in benefit of their members. UNISON, as an example, offers steward training internally. Its course is structured in two steps during five days, where future representatives are taught their roles as stewards. UNISON also offers further courses for those stewards interested.

It may be so that those who do not explicitly state that they facilitate internal education for members, do indeed facilitate it. Some information may simply not be accessible to non-members. The BCGEU is such an example. It has a log-in for members, and only a few organized local, short, courses and learning activities accessible to see for the general public. This may mean that BCGEU has educational information, or other topics of interest, behind closed doors. Conclusively, those labor unions who list few educational tools on their respective websites may do so for other reasons, and it does not mean that they do not educate their members.

Many labor unions have internal research on various topics such as wages and workplaces. NUPGE, as an example, conducts research on topics such as tax policies, labor legislation, and the national pension plan. A further example is the OSSTF, which researches certain issues from around the world, such as hunger or water, and creates curriculum material for Canadian students to learn about the topics researched. The OSSTF cooperates with educational unions in host countries and with Canadian NGOs when conducting research. Others do not only conduct own research, but they write reports – almost operating more like political organizations rather than labor unions. NEU, as an example, operates in this manner, publishing reports and research which is broad in scope, addressing topics concerning education, the climate, or urbanization. Some union research is broad, while some is more niched toward the roles of the membership, such as the research by NFU Canada, which researches things which benefit farmers.

Some labor unions educate their members to be more politically literate and encourage workers to be actively engaged in the political landscapes of different levels of society. In essence, promoting political engagement of workers. The HSA, as an example, engages with its members' issues, but also with community issues of the province. The HSA has a committee which involves and engages members in political activities which are important to the HSA, such as “participating in campaigns to support progressive legislation and participating in the local, provincial and federal electoral process” (HSA, n.d.). This committee is also responsible for how their political action fund is used.

All 28 labor unions are, in one way or another, affiliated with an organization, political party, or community. Some are vocally nonpartisan, while others affiliate with political parties. The UFCW, as an example, is affiliated to the New Democratic Party of Canada, and Unite the Union is affiliated with the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. Some labor unions express identifiable political engagement, without mentioning affiliations, such as the CUPE which argues that “[t]he powerful economic, corporate and political forces behind right-wing

governments are global, and our response must be as well” (CUPE, 2019). This subtle sentence communicates that CUPE most likely leans the other way from right-wing politics, but does not disclose any political party affiliations.

All 28 labor unions work with various forms of lobbying, whether it is by their own means or through other affiliate unions and organizations. Some labor unions may hold virtual lobbying events, e.g., the CLC, while others lobby members of parliament in direct interactions. Lobbying subjects are broad, ranging topics from public institutions; health and safety; labor rights; equality; education; indigenous rights; promoting jobs for unions’ membership base; foreign affairs; citizens’ rights, to tax evasion; trade, energy, or industrial policies; laws, and many more. Most labor unions lobby toward their domestic politicians, but some also lobby on supranational levels, and other international levels. The FBU, as an example, claims to be active on the local, regional, and national level when campaigning on various issues. FBU’s topics range from labor related issues to health issues and disarmament.

4.2.3 International Union Activities

Most mission statements, constitutions, and *About* pages are focused on internal operations. However, 12 out of 28 labor unions have somewhat of an international agenda section on their respective webpages or in their constitutions. Some of these 12 labor unions have officially elected members who work in international committees. Such committees may work with internal union policies which relate to the international domain; funding and development of international projects; communication with other committees on international issues; involvement of members in international causes; and sharing experiences with people globally. Many labor unions extend their international work beyond work-related issues, such as Unifor, which expresses to work beyond the traditional form of unionism with issues such as “violence against women, tax policy, Aboriginal issues, and health care” (Uniforum, 2016, p. 3).

UNISON, as another example, has an international section on its website where it describes to work with individual labor unions, global union federations, and organizations of interest on public services topics and in working internationally against austerity. In its contact with external unions and organizations, UNISON describes its mission is to share insight and experiences, engage in solidarity, and to involve own members in this work. UNISON also internationally works with and engages civil society. Another example is the international initiative by the NFU Canada, which works on more farmer-focused questions

concerning seeds, trade deals, land issues, and more. Many of the labor unions with international committees also have newsletters which updates members on international happenings. Other labor unions have extensive investigative information and journalism on international cases, and some, such as NEU (n.d.2), even organize international solidarity conferences exclusively held for members.

The remaining 16 labor unions who do *not* have international committees or clear international sections in their constitutions or websites, mostly publish information on international news in sections of their websites. Some of these 16 unions refer to national or global unions with which they affiliate. The Land Workers' Alliance, as an example, does not have its own international page, but claims to be an active member of La Via Capesina. Furthermore, an objective of the Land Workers' Alliance is to "build relationships with political parties and decision makers at local, national and international levels" (Land Workers' Alliance, 2020, p. 9), and it argues to have the capacity to do so because of its active involvement in La Via Capesina. In fact, all sampled labor unions affiliate with various organizations and causes of interests, and many have international connections. The FBU, as an example, coordinates together with other labor unions via the meta-union TUC, on international activities, and works with Public Services International and the European Public Service Union – which are international and global labor federations.

7 out of the 28 labor unions have an official international fund. Such funds can help with humanitarian and labor development; labor protection; human rights issues; with building relational networks with workers internationally; projects of solidarity; and funding for labor-related education. Some labor unions can have members vouch for an international cause to be considered aiding, while others, such as UNISON's international work, targets more exclusively labor union movements in the global south. BCGEU (n.d.), as an example, invests in its international fund by contributing with "20 cents per member per month to the fund to help support a number of projects and partner our organization with different unions, community groups and non-governmental organizations." Others have charity branches, such as the TUC (n.d.), which can aid with financial support and labor solidarity around the world. TUC's charity is funded by reserve funds, appeals to affiliates, crowdfunding, sometimes funded by the state, and other donations.

Many labor unions describe neoliberal tendencies as negative forces in society, and some are highly devoted to opposing them. Unite, as an example, is one of two founders of Workers Uniting, which is an international union established to "challenge the injustices of globalization" (Unite the Union, n.d.). The PSAC, as another example, has its own designated

website (a combined initiative with two other unions), where people can sign campaigns against the state contracting out public services to private corporations (PSAC, n.d.). Or AUPE (n.d.2), which has an anti-privatization branch where it works with, among other things, educating members or lobbying to politicians, about issues relating to privatization.

Others do not explicitly direct to an anti-neoliberal campaign, but rather describe their stance on neoliberalism, such as UNISON, which argues that “[i]ncreasingly workers’ rights are coming under threat as neo-liberal policies are implemented globally” (UNISON, n.d.), followed by a statement that they cooperate with labor unions and organizations of interest to combat labor rights related issues. The international committee of CUPE, as another example, works with international partners to create “a global movement to oppose corporate privatization, trade, deregulation, and increased threats to security, peace and human rights” (CUPE, 2015). And Unifor, in its constitution, states that it seeks “[t]o resist corporate globalization and provide alternatives to job-destroying trade deals and policies.” (Unifor, 2019, p. 4).

4.3 Solidarity Statements

I have read and analyzed signed solidarity statements of all 28 labor unions. Many labor unions have co-signed solidarity statements, which means that the actual number of unique documents varies from the sampled size. I will nonetheless treat each co-signature as a unique expression of solidarity from ever sampled labor union. Two samples, NUPGE and the Land Workers’ Alliance, have two documents connected to their solidarity statement. One is a broader newsletter (NUPGE, 2020), and the other is a letter designated to the UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (Land Workers’ Alliance, 2021, January 14).

Solidarity appears to have similar meanings to those sampled labor unions who have explained it. For them, solidarity means to be vocal when labor unionists are under attack; assist other labor unions in building themselves up; and share insight and experiences with similar actors – involving members throughout this work. It also means to do physical and virtual solidary actions, such as strikes, marches, protests, parties, and other social gatherings. It means building networks, which means engaging with civil society and supporting certain campaigns and causes with funding, or supporting policies of interest. Many argue that solidarity means tackling problems at their roots, challenging power structures, or recognizing who is privileged and who is not. Solidarity for many means equality, and committing to justice. Solidarity means, as HEU puts it, “to walk the walk, not just talk the talk” (Nederpel,

2019). Many labor unions have solidarity slogans like HEU, such as CUPE (2019, p. 1), which states that “[u]ntil all of us are free, none of us are free.”, or Unite the Union (2021) and Unifor (2019, p. 2) who both state that “[i]njury to one is an injury to all”. Unifor argues that solidarity is the action with which they work around such *injuries*. Solidarity means to work for the same labor causes for others as the union does for itself. In other words, labor union fraternity is an expression of solidarity.

It appears that many view solidarity as action statements – which can draw attention to any ongoing struggle. But solidarity, for others, can also mean to aid with resources, e.g., financial support. It, furthermore, appears that solidarity means to build relations on the grounds of shared policies or ideas about unionism. For some, solidarity is learning and educating through various idea-sharing activities. For ILWU, as an example, labor solidarity means to assist any worker who needs help, and they argue that labor solidarity “stands above all else” (ILWU, n.d.). Other labor unions argue that solidarity means to *act* and that such actions give power in fighting injustices at home, within the union, and abroad internationally. Solidarity between workers transnationally, it is often argued, helps to build a powerful global labor movement. NEU, as an example, claims that international solidarity is fundamental for the work it does within the union. By working in solidarity internationally, labor unions want to “oppose oppression, fight for trade union and human rights, challenge austerity, champion public services, and campaign for equal opportunities.” (NEU, n.d.1).

All solidarity statements express solidarity with the Indian farmers and farm workers, and all labor unions also inform their reader about the state of the farmers’ movement. 6 out of the 28 sampled labor unions give extensive information – whether in their own or in co-signed solidarity statements. 17 out of the 28 sampled labor unions, to varying degrees, mention actors other than the Indian farmers, such as *allies* or *activists*. Although very few solidarity statements explicitly express solidarity with the unions in India. Unite the Union (2021), as an example, explains that it “stands in full solidarity with the Indian trade union movement and Indian farmers and workers [...]”. Although others – when mentioning actors other than the Indian farmers, often do so in describing the movement, and not as a pleading solidarity statement for such actors. The BCGEU (2020), as an example, expresses to “echo the calls [...] to immediately release all political prisoners, including union members, arrested for protesting these draconian laws.” The BCGEU is, then, not necessarily showing solidarity with unions in India, but rather acknowledging their existence in the movement.

All labor unions have expressed some form of criticism toward the government of India, although some unions express very mild criticism, while other use a normatively loaded

language. 5 out of the 28 sampled labor unions, and 1 of the 2 joint solidarity statements, directs some form of higher attention to the Indian government in their solidarity statements. The HEU (2020), as an example, “urges the Indian government to protect its agricultural sector from corporate occupation” and HEAL (2021) furthermore claims to “join the international call demanding that the Indian government listen to the farming communities that have been stewarding the land for generations.”

3 out of the 28 sampled labor unions explain to work together with their affiliates over this cause. The PRLC (2020), as an example, elaborate: “[W]e ask that our affiliates advocate for and support all local community organizing. Together, let’s show our commitment to international solidarity.” Furthermore, the UFCW (2021), mentions international labor standards and argues that the new laws and reforms are inconsistent with international labor standards “that India has committed to as a member of the” ILO.

Almost all sampled labor unions mention something about neoliberalism in their solidarity statements, using words such as liberalization of state protection; privatization; deregulation; corporatization; or commercialization. Some mention these neoliberalist words only to describe the policies, while others have normative connotations, such as the following statements show. In the joint solidarity statement by Canadian labor unions and organizations – which was released as an advertisement in the Toronto Star late February 2021, it is argued that “[t]he laws blatantly advance the interests of Modi’s crony corporate capitalists [...], effectively throwing farmers to the corporate sharks” (NUPGE, 2021). Or as found in the joint statement by labor unions from the British Isles, it is argued that “[n]eoliberal policies that make the poorest pay whilst corporations amass massive profits have driven huge inequality and a planet on the edge of catastrophe” (Rehman et al., 2021). And HEAL (2021) finally argues that:

“By pulling government support and opening the market to privatization, this new system erodes farmers’ and agricultural workers’ bargaining power and makes them — and consumers — vulnerable to exploitation by the same agribusinesses that have a stranglehold on the American food system, whose business practices exploit workers, push small and medium producers out of the market, and pollute our land, water and air.”

4 out of the 28 labor unions term the new farming policies implemented by the Indian government as *anti-worker* or *anti-farmer* agendas and labor practices. The CUPW (2020), as

an example, calls for people to stand in solidarity with the Indian farmers, over, what it means is “[a] corporate takeover of agriculture [which] is designed to strip farmers of their livelihoods, causing massive inequality. This globalized anti-worker agenda must be dismantled”.

6 out of the 28 sampled labor unions compare the struggles of Indian farmers to struggles within their own countries, arguing that they can learn from the persistence of the Indian farmers’ movement. The NFU U.S. (2021), as an example, argues that these are “issues that are all too familiar to farmers in the United States”. NFU Canada, as another example, recognizes that India and Canada differ, but state that, as expressed by NFU President Katie Ward, “[w]e in Canada recognize the Indian farmers’ struggle as similar to our own struggle” (NFU Canada, 2020).

The Land Workers’ Alliance shares NFU Canada’s standpoint, elaborating that:

Our experience of this development model here in the UK is desultory; smaller farmers being squeezed off the land, intensification of farming practices and the growth of powerful market actors like supermarkets. As small scale producers in the UK, struggling to survive in this non-conducive political climate, we must show solidarity with farmers in India resisting the marketisation that we have already undergone. All power to the farmers, all power to the strikes! (Land Workers’ Alliance, 2021, January 6)

The NFU U.S. (2021) concludes that “[i]f our experience here in the United States is any indication, they are right to be concerned.”

Some labor unions also relate to their internal membership base, describing how many of them “have family and friends in Punjab who will be negatively affected by these bills.” (HSA, 2020). ILWU, likewise, argues that its workers, “many of whom have strong connections to farmers on the front lines, express our solidarity with the farmers protesting in India” (ILWU, 2020).

4 out of the 28 sampled labor unions have directions for solidary actions in their statements. CUPE (2021), as an example, has a guided solidarity information list with steps on how to show support to the movement. These include donating money, joining protests, showing solidarity on social media via hashtags, and filming short solidary videos with specific directions. PRLC (2020) also utilizes social media, and asks people to share information in social media under hashtags such as #StandWithFarmers, #Tractor2Twitter,

and #NoFarmersNoFood. PRLC also has a sample resolution for people to fill out and have their own organization support the cause of Indian farmers. Both the HSA and GMB, in a similar manner, encourage their members to send out emails to members of parliament or to sign petitions to the Indian High Commission, with guided directions on their respective webpages.

6 out of the 28 labor unions argue that India used the COVID-19 pandemic as a diffuser to implement the farming laws. Unite, as an example, argues that it “is appalled that the Indian government has implemented wide scale repression under the excuse of Covid-19.” (Unite the Union, 2021). The national president of Unifor, Jerry Dias, similarly expresses: “Shame on India’s government for using a pandemic as an excuse to ram through draconian industrial reforms” (Unifor, 2020). Likewise, the AFL (2020) concludes that “[m]any jurisdictions are using the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to implement ‘disaster capitalism’, passing policies that attack the public good and workers’ rights”.

4.4 Email Interviews

I contacted all 28 labor unions who had expressed solidarity with the case. 8 out of 28 answered my email request (see appendix 1), which means that 20 labor unions did not answer. This non-response affects my ability to draw solid conclusions from email correspondences. The 8 labor unions who did answer consist of 4 general unions and 4 specialized unions. All 8 email answers will be treated and analyzed for what has been written, but also beyond. It is likewise the unwritten, shortness, or standardized answers which are of interest. As the following paragraphs will show, the email answers differed in effort and information richness.

The 1st labor union representative described that their internal union solidarity action for the Indian farmers’ context consisted of signing a solidarity letter on a board meeting. A copy of that said letter was sent to all local branches of the union, and other affiliates of the union. Furthermore, they also notified me that several of their local union branches had made monetary donations to the Indian farmers’ cause. I was furthermore informed that a representative of one local branch went on an Indian language talk show to discuss the issue, and to discuss the support this union was showing the Indian farmers. The representative I communicated with also informed me that they have members who come from a long lineage of Indian farmers.

A 2nd labor union answered my email request by referring to the political party which the union is affiliated with, and expressed that they have supported resolutions for political action on the matter of the Indian farmers. The representative informed me that the union is an affiliate of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations, and tell me that it looks to that global union federation for leadership on global food worker issues.

The 3rd labor union representative described how their union has worked with a non-governmental organization and charity, with other labor unions within the country it is situated in, and the national meta-union, in the unions' support of the Indian farmers and workers strike and campaign. This union signed a joint statement where it, together with other co-authors, called for the repeal of the laws which, it argued, would further threaten the livelihood and rights of some of the poorest citizens of India. The representative also informed me that the union has encouraged its members and other visitors of the unions' website to write to the Indian High Commission for the country they are situated in, to appeal for the laws to be repealed.

The representative furthermore elaborated on other notions of transnational solidarity which the union has engaged with in the past, and gave examples of having worked closely with Indian and African unions in the security industry. The representative told me that this involvement had offered support for organizing and building capacity among the participating unions. The representative finally concluded with giving an example of when this union had worked in the shipbreaking sector, partnering with an Indian union, to draw attention to the high risks of this sector in India. The representative informed me that the union had pushed at the national, supranational, and global level for greater health safety and environmental protection in the sector, and to ban child labor within the sector. The labor unions' campaign had gained support on the subnational level where the efforts expanded on that level.

The 4th labor union representative I interviewed informed me that their union had written one solidarity statement and co-signed another some months later. The union also used social media as a tool to spread information on the topic. The representative also informed me that the national labor center which the union is affiliated with issued a solidarity statement. To this labor union, solidarity means helping to raise awareness of an issue among members, allies, and the public, and helping to maintain political pressure—on both the Indian government and the government of the labor union, to act. They inform me that their union does not have any direct relationship with unions (or other activists) in India, but that they have sought to echo the movement's demands.

The 5th labor union informed me that it co-signed a solidarity statement because it, from experience, knows how powerful solidarity messages can be. This representative argued that, whether support comes from a local labor union branch or from across the world, when action is being taken, the thought that people are behind one's cause and supporting is empowering. The representative informed me about when the unions' own members from McDonalds went out on strike (a different situation but nonetheless) and that the messages they received from people they had never met meant the world to them and reinforced to them that what they were doing was the right thing. The representative furthermore explained that their union wanted to give that to their brothers and sisters over in India.

I was also informed that this labor union has members who are of Indian heritage, which means that they have been able to send messages of support that way, and local officials have been able to give them updates from the ground on the situation.

This labor union also tells me that it is educating its members about what is happening in India and that it has also been asked by members in another region to talk to their Parliamentary Group about what they can do to support and encourage attendance at online meetings, and to link up with campaign groups to add pressure on the Indian Government to change their position on the farming laws they passed last year.

The 6th labor union shared with me that it is affiliated to the ITUC, and it is given how some Indian unions are affiliated in ITUC as well that this labor union can have a fraternal relationship with those Indian labor unions. The labor union has responded to appeals launched by the ITUC on behalf of the Indian unions for global solidarity support. This labor union also informs me that it expressed support for the National Strike of November 2020 in India, which was called for by Indian unions.

The 7th labor union representative expressed, in a short email, that it only signed the solidarity statement as an action of solidarity with the Indian farmers. There were no further explanations or resources given to me in this exchange. The 8th labor union had informed me that another internal representative would work with me for email interviews, but I did not hear back from this person.

5. Analysis

This chapter is devoted to answering my research question posed in Chapter 1, namely asking: How do national labor unions function as transnational actors? By using the theoretical discussion from Chapter 2, I will analyze the data presented in the previous chapter. I will explore and discuss my research question by presenting what characterizes labor unions' transnational activities, and what possibilities or constraints they face within the international world. In section 5.1.4 *What Unions Do Not Do – Indian Farmers' Movement*, I am combining points from all previous chapters in the discussions on what appears to be lacking in my sampled labor unions' transnational involvement. Section 5.1.4 also concludes this analysis chapter with a summarizing paragraph.

5.1 Unions as Transnational Actors

5.1.1 What Unions Do – Indian Farmers' Movement

To grasp at what labor unions do, I will quickly from the data above, summarize what they *are* in terms of their organizational role. All 28 sampled labor unions have some form of labor focus, but many – if not all, have pluralist identities calling themselves various social, political, and environmental organizational categories, such as grassroots farmers organization. Labor unions may self-identify in this manner because the society they operate within expects them to do so (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), but it may likewise be an internal strategic choice to self-identify in this manner. Nonetheless, almost all labor unions' primary focus is on their organizations' internal operations. Only some, such as the CLC or TUC which both are national meta-unions, appear to focus more on external activities. The general focus shared by most labor unions regards issues that members face, or labor related issues locally – sometimes nationally, where the unions are situated.

All sampled labor unions have partaken in solidary actions of various impact levels in the case of the Indian farmers' movement. Some have written joint solidarity statements, and some have formed personalized solidarity statements. A couple labor unions have partaken in repeated written solidary actions, while some have voiced more informally their positions in social media. Some have also collected money for the cause. Everyone express solidarity with the Indian farmers, however only some extend that to other actors of interest within the context, e.g., Indian labor unions. The way that labor unions address the Indian farmers'

movement differs somewhat. This may be due to different internal organizational or ideological strategies which the different labor unions operate under (Risse, 2007).

Furthermore, labor unions educate their members and others about the Indian farmers' movement. Educating about a cause like this not only informs about it, but also fosters deeper understanding about injustices (Forrester, 2010), and can create commonality between union members transnationally. It becomes a way to formally acknowledge the injustice and to draw attention to the case. As one labor unions representative emailed, arguing that it is empowering for the people fighting against injustices when they know that other people are supporting them, and that it does not matter who this support comes from.

Not only do labor unions educate their own members and communities (Forrester, 2010; Seeliger, 2019), but they educate broader – people like me. The circumstances and history leading up to the Indian farmers' movement in 2020 can be somewhat challenging to understand; especially considering the contested nature of the movement (Varghese, 2020; Garcha, 2020), and the poor and questionable coverage of the movement itself in Indian and international media (Crowley, 2020). Furthermore, as mentioned briefly in Chapter 3 *Methods*, Indian actors of interest have communicated on social media platforms written in Hindi and Devanagari script, which was not possible for me to translate and understand accurately. The 28 sampled labor unions have, in this case, acted as solid pools of condensed information, with graspable information about the movement for anyone curious. Although, keeping in mind that only 6 out of the 28 sampled labor unions provided extensive information.

They are, nonetheless, able to – by having insight in the case and most likely with people in the country, give an overview which informs the general public. Because of their labor-oriented scope, they can shed light on things which would have perhaps otherwise been unknown. By informing the general public through their solidarity statements, and by educating internally and externally people who are interested, labor unions are making normative claims about the Indian farmers' movement case. None of the 28 sampled labor unions appear to be nonpartisan. They all side with the Indian farmers, hence making labor unions highly politicized transnational actors.

Furthermore, by educating their own members, communities, and beyond, the sampled labor unions are also able to communicate with politicians and policymakers about the case, acting as pressure groups toward governments (Pencavel, 2007). The Land Workers' Alliance letter to UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab, is probably the most concrete example of a labor union acting as pressure group toward the government.

As labor unions act as pressure groups toward governments in their own countries, all labor unions also direct attention to the Indian government and, to various degrees, criticize the Indian government. HEU (2020) and HEAL (2021) used *urging* and *demanding* respectively as words directed toward the Indian government. This resembles formal diplomatic language which “offer a precise set of escalated distinctions” of the cause (Krause, 1998, p. 6), and it relates to Guilbaud’s (2020) discussions on non-state actors partaking in diplomatic practices. Such diplomatic language and practice relates to ideas of sovereignty, which notably, is not static, and can be challenged from above and below. It therefore appears that labor unions are – much like any other actor in the international arena, engaging in sovereignty struggles and challenging the traditional conception of sovereignty (Keck & Sikkink, 2014).

5.1.2 Structure and Motivations

Considering the four dimensions, the *structural*, *associational*, *organizational*, and *institutional*, within which labor unions achieve their objectives in (Rosetti, 2019), it appears that most of the sampled labor unions achieve transnationalism on the *associational* dimension. It essentially means that labor unions – by virtue of being unions, manage to communicate solidarity transnationally as a united front. Only in some rare occasions have solidarity statements been communicated by an individual, and in those cases, it has been the president or other key figures of unions.

Furthermore, there appears to be no visible internal conflict regarding the support for the Indian farmers’ movement across my 28 sampled labor unions. This may be due to shared ideological convictions within and across the unions (Hyman, 2011), which can be seen in the data on the majority of the 28 sampled labor unions in one way, or another, opposing the new farming bills or the forces of neoliberalism (Gall, Hurd, & Wilkinson, 2011). However, the lack of internal conflict regarding the support for Indian farmers is most likely due to my sampling strategy (selecting labor unions who expressed solidarity with Indian farmers), and not because labor unions universally oppose these new farming bills.

The reasons why the 28 sampled labor unions are involved in transnational efforts can be understood by assessing their internal structure and their motivations for international involvement (Risse, 2007). Internally, some labor unions have the resources to pursue labor internationalism, such as through their international committees, while others do not have these same niched units, internally. Furthermore, motivations are varying, with some being

motivated by a passive labor internationalism, which can be connected to the solidarity *with* dimension (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2015). Others argue that acting internationally translates to power in fighting injustices within their own contexts. Such motivations for international involvement can best be described through the various unity-slogans, such as CUPE's (2019, p. 1) "[u]ntil all of us are free, none of us are free.", or Unite the Union (2021) and Unifor's (2019, p. 2) "[i]njury to one is an injury to all".

Labor unions operate for their internal members, which also translates externally (Mundlak, 2020), however operations *for* members does not mean to always, in a utility-maximizing manner, work to provide material benefits for members, such as various member benefits and discounts. Some labor unions claim that – by participating in transnational solidary actions, they indirectly help their own members and communities. For most of my samples, it appears that working *for members* is an integrated strategy of many components, which fosters changed norms and practices. This relates to various discussions found in Furåker and Larsson's (2020) book on why labor unions commit to solidarity. They argue that labor unions are "strategic and interest-based actors that are continuously weighing costs and benefits, but their strategic orientations are constrained or facilitated by the structural and institutional settings in which they operate" (Furåker & Larsson, 2020, p. 126). This essentially means that labor union motivations and actions cannot be understood without an assessment of the rules and norms which guide their society.

Whether a labor union operates on individual or universal concerns depends on their internal logic, but also on the external political structure (Gahan & Pekarek, 2013), such as the neoliberal landscape within which they operate in. While most of the sampled labor unions operate for their members who are individuals, the national meta-unions TUC and CLC appear to operate on a slightly different approach. Their operations are based on relations with national labor unions whom they support advance their own work. Both work with labor unions across the world and through other meta-organizations.

The abovementioned motivations for solidarity can be imagined as a relational system operating on three levels: Structure (the neoliberal landscape), actor (such as an organization), and individual (person). For my 28 sampled labor unions, the neoliberal landscape holds rules and norms which makes labor unions make internal changes to match the ideas of what organizational work means in the society they are operating in (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), but where also the unionized workers' own particularities will influence the trajectory of solidary actions (Scholz, 2008).

5.1.3 Solidarity in Action

The structure lays ground for how organizations can and should behave in their particular context, which they most likely will follow as courtesy to be taken as serious actors, and individuals within organizations, with their own particularities, will micro-influence organizations. Members' own particularities also play a role in unions' solidarity motivations (Scholz, 2008).

An individuals' motivations for solidarity are, as mentioned in Chapter 2, personal – but nonetheless powerful. Scholz' (2008) examples of individual influences on solidary actions can be seen in several examples in my data, for instance when union representatives mention that members come from a line of Indian farmers; when key figures of labor unions have attended Indian news channels in their native language; or when both the NFU U.S. and NFU Canada have shared their own stories as farmers. This final example relates to Hyman's (2011) *identity-based* type of solidarity, which unities people under the same occupational group, and *common interests-based* solidarity, because they agree over the problems and solutions for the context which the Indian farmers are in.

All sampled labor unions have in some ways expressed solidarity with the Indian farmers' movement. Some have mentioned the Indian farmers' *unions* in their solidarity statements, but most have only mentioned the movement or the farm workers. The 4th email interview also specified that they do not have any direct relationship with unions (or other activists) in India. The solidary scope of these cases is transnational, but the level is varying, somewhere in between Scholz' (2008) spectrum of weak to strong. The 4 labor unions who presented directions for solidary actions via their solidarity statements could, from Scholz' (2008) spectrum, be viewed to show stronger forms of solidarity.

Most of the 28 sampled labor unions' solidarity statements appear to be a one-time occurrence. There are only two samples, NUPGE (2020) and the Land Workers' Alliance (2021, January 14), who have more than one document connected to their solidarity statements. Although discussed to be problematic to assess and measure, Scholz' (2008) discussions on weak solidary actions are relevant here. The one-time solidary statements of the 26 remaining labor unions can be understood as virtue-signaling, weak in nature.

There are, nonetheless, different positions actors may take for solidarity. Some have shown solidarity *with* Indian farmers, and some have shown solidarity *against* neoliberal farming bills. If we understand Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman's (2015) *with-against* definition as one being more avoidant and the other a more conflictual form of solidarity, then

we may also, taken from Scholz' (2008), understand one as weaker and one as stronger. In other words, there is a fundamental difference in strength and action between, for instance, the 7th labor union representative email, that shortly expressed to only sign the statement as an action of solidarity *with* the Indian farmers, and that of HEAL's (2021) much longer quote found in section 4.3 *Solidarity Statements*, which is an example of solidarity *against* the new farming bills.

A combination of the ritualized ways of showing solidarity is what I call an *ornamental* form of solidarity. It falls into Scholz (2008) category of weak solidarity, because the motivations for the solidarity actions are not deep and consistent (Scholz, 2008). It is also an ornamental solidarity, because it is expected from the society within which unions operate in, which relates to Meyer and Rowan's (1977) arguments on institutional myths which organizations adopt ceremonially.

Even though labor unions do not navigate transnational unionism with homogenic reasoning (Furåker & Larsson, 2020), they still appear to have similarly identified issues that Indian farmers are facing. 6 out of the 28 sampled labor unions compare the struggles of Indian farmers to struggles within their own countries, and it also appears that similar occupational categories share similar experiences and concerns, as both the NFU U.S., NFU Canada, and Land Workers' Alliance express. This shared struggle relates to Hyman's (2011) *mutuality despite difference*, where actors – seemingly different, still appear to share certain struggles and interests with each other. It is empowering, as one email correspondence argued, the people facing injustices, when they are show solidarity.

A labor unions' investment in an international cause can depend on internal interests of key members of the union, as the labor representative from the 1st union informed me that some of their members come from a lineage of Indian farmers. Although having an interest in certain causes may also be completely arbitrary. It, furthermore, appears that labor unions view that transnational solidarity efforts open up possibilities to work with issues extending beyond the traditional workers' issues. Such as the NEU stated to “oppose oppression, fight for trade union and human rights, challenge austerity, champion public services, and campaign for equal opportunities.” (NEU, n.d.1).

The solidary actions which the 28 sampled labor unions have partaken in can be considered political solidarity (Scholz, 2008), because all labor unions identify the oppressor (Laitinen & Pessi, 2014; Ollman, 1968) of the Indian farmers – that is, the Indian government. Solidary actions can be understood as soft-power tools which aid in putting pressure on key figures of power and which can change norms. All sampled labor unions express solidarity,

but most solidary actions appear ornamental, and weak. However, as I also argued in Chapter 2, a seemingly weak solidary action, such as that of the 7th labor union representative, may still be impactful in its own particular way.

5.1.4 What Unions Do Not Do – Indian Farmers’ Movement

Taking all previous sections from Chapter 5 into account, I will devote this section to labor union inactions regarding the Indian farmers’ movement, beginning with discussing international committees. Although 12 out of the 28 labor unions have some form of an international agenda; some having elected members who work in special international units or committees, none of them appear to have integral strategies for international operationalizations, and none of them had – at the time of sampling, a substantial ongoing work devoted to the Indian farmers’ movement. It, therefore, appears to be little strategic transnational engagement with labor unions.

Furthermore, the 28 sampled labor unions appear to not further relations with affiliates and potential other actors of interest. I found little to no information on labor unions actively engaging with their affiliated unions and organizations; only 3 out of the 28 labor unions expressed that they work with affiliates regarding the Indian farmers’ movement cause. Furthermore, it appears that the 28 sampled labor unions do not communicate with Indian farmers unions, and from the data I have gathered, it does not even appear that they communicate much with the Indian farmers themselves. They rather communicate to their own members, communities, and sometimes governments, about issues concerning the Indian farming bills. They are, therefore, not able to create lasting transnational advocacy networks, as Keck and Sikkink (2014) outline.

In discussing strong and weak solidarity, Scholz (2008) argues that it can be considered strong if there is active commitment which involves substantial transformation of one’s own life or the cause one is performing the solidary actions to. The political solidarity for this case appears to be weak, because the aim is either nonexistent, singular, and (across all samples for the researched time being) short-lived. Only in very few cases does there appear to be a substantial aim and plan, for instance, those labor unions who continuously donate money and write to members of parliament. Even though labor unions may have strong internal structures or internal ideological convictions relating to what is normatively good (Risse, 2007) – which essentially relates to transnational solidarity, it may still not be strong enough, in Scholz (2008) sense of weak or strong solidarity. Pochet and Vandaele

(2017) argue that transnational labor operations are crucial in our global relations, but for the illustrative case and sampled labor unions, it appears that transnational labor operations are ornamental and weak, and that labor unions overall do not have strong international strategies.

In conclusion of this section 5.1 *Unions as Transnational Actors*, labor unions appear to function as transnational actors through operations which are situated locally and nationally. They engage in political solidarity (Scholz, 2008), by educating their own members, communities, and nations on issues concerning the Indian farmers' movement, and they also educate broader – people like me. Labor unions show solidarity through solidarity statements – individually and jointly written, and they act as pressure groups toward their governments (Pencavel, 2007). They, furthermore, use normatively loaded language; sometimes resembling diplomatic language. Labor unions do not, however, show signs of having strong international strategies; show strong political solidarity; or create and foster transnational advocacy networks.

5.2 Potential Issues or Possibilities

5.2.1 Issues

I addressed and discussed the functions of labor unions as transnational actors in the previous section 5.1, and I will here address the potential issues or possibilities that labor unions may face within the international world, by combining points from the data and from the previous chapter section. I begin with discussing and problematizing the level of influence labor unions have in the roles they hold. It has been established that labor unions hold pluralist roles in society, however, their ability to fulfil the dual purpose of labor unionism – serving members' interests and promoting egalitarianism within society (Rosetti, 2019), it not as straight forward in practice. Even if labor unions would want to be influential, and were internally equipped for the role to influence, does not mean that their immediate or broader surrounding would recognize them as influential.

Labor unions' internal value system and strategies translate out and influence their abilities to be influential (Ibsen & Tapia, 2017), and many labor unions act as counterforces in a seemingly hostile neoliberal landscape (Hyman, 2011; Gall, Hurd, & Wilkinson, 2011). Translated to the international arena, then, it is unlikely that labor unions, as lonely entities who oppose the overarching guiding principles of neoliberalism, will have a strong influence.

Perhaps that is why the sampled labor unions do not have developed international strategies, as there are forces outside of their control which hinder them to develop in that area.

Furthermore, it is the recognition aspect of Guilbaud's (2020) arguments about diplomatic practices by non-state actors, which may indicate that my sampled labor unions have a weak role of influence internationally. Other than some mentions in Indian media about the solidarity from North-Western situated labor unions, I did not find many or significant "other actors in the international system" (Guilbaud, 2020, p. 193) who recognized the activities of my sampled labor unions. This can be understood clearer when comparing with the recognition that Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau has gotten, and likewise activists and celebrities in social media.

Given how the organizational structures of labor unions "are difficult and slow to reform" (Seeliger, 2019, p. 17), labor unions international efforts also appear to be a slow apparatus, where solidarity travels through many bodies before it *reaches* its destination. The big organism which labor unions operate within may also be stalling their abilities to form natural advocacy networks. Take FBU as an example, which is affiliated with TUC which also works with Public Services International and the European Public Service Union. Having numerous affiliations does not necessarily mean working effectively internationally. This body of labor relations may pose an issue for the solidary action from the initial source to be powerful if it must travel through so many bodies.

However, as argued in Chapter 2, issues concerning transnational union cooperation can also be more straightforward and, for instance, involve language barriers or differences in union structure (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2015), and for my case, also the COVID-19 pandemic. It is likely that the COVID-19 pandemic has hindered the 28 sampled labor unions to form deeper relations, e.g., by traveling to the center of the movement.

5.2.2 Possibilities

I presented the neoliberal landscape as a landscape creating issues, but it can likewise be a possibility for labor union internationalism. Given how many of the 28 sampled labor unions describe neoliberal tendencies as negative forces in society, and how some of them are actively opposing these forces, it also means that the neoliberal landscape creates a common ground for labor unions. This relates to, in the broadest sense, Ollman's (1968) points about the Marxist dual conception of class-struggle. I am more specifically referring to the union formation with shared struggles where there is common ground to be found. Not only do my

sampled labor unions have the possibility to share their experiences with the Indian farmers, but the Indian farmers likewise inspire my sampled labor unions.

This is concretely shown in the data section where 6 out of the 28 sampled labor unions express to share similar struggles with the Indian farmers. Not only do these labor unions relate to each other on an occupational level, e.g., being farm or food workers, but they are also connected through similar struggles, such as when the NFU U.S., NFU Canada, or the Land Workers' Alliance, share their own experiences of the struggles that Indian farmers are experiencing now. Some neoliberal forces in society truly are global, and sharing struggles can be a powerful binding element in fostering international networks (Keck & Sikkink, 2014). The neoliberal landscape therefore facilitates common ground which may motivate common solutions.

Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travels to the heart of the Indian farmers' movement, may not have posed such an obstacle to union transnationalism as one may assume. Fougner and Kurtoğlu's (2011) research showed how activists and unions traveled to the center of the strikes of Novamed to show their support, but perhaps such travels are not the main signifiers of a successful solidary action. Social media may very well be just as good. It is an outlet for quick solidarity. It is not slow paced where one must travel to a physical place. It is very likely that social media facilitated traction in the Indian farmers' movement context, as the Indian farmers' unions webpages are outdated, but their Twitter accounts are constantly updated (see appendix 3). Although I did not concretely gather data from social media outlets, they may have been the biggest resource for my 28 sampled labor unions to utilize within the Indian farmers' movement.

If we think of labor unions as transnational actors who only practice ornamental internationalism, their actions may nonetheless have impactful value, or be considered strong solidarity (Scholz, 2008), because they are a part of creating norms for other unions and organizations. Even if these labor unions do the bare minimum, maybe do little in those operations, they still position themselves as actors identifying and opposing status quo of said case. Therefore, no matter if the solidary action is weak or strong, as discussed by Scholz (2008), or if it is impactful or not, it will most likely – by virtue of its movement, be a part of influencing norms. A possibility within the international world is precisely that any actor may have influence over a particular cause.

Labor unions and other transnational actors which have expressed solidarity with the Indian farmers have not been perceived as threatening or meddling in India's internal affairs which, for instance, the commentary by the Canadian prime minister Justin Trudeau, has. In

the previous section, I argued that labor unions were not being recognized as important actors due to their weak level of influence. However, not being recognized must not necessarily mean that an actor is not influential. It may even be due to labor unions' seemingly weak position on the international arena, that they are in fact able to continue their transnational solidary operations – unnoticed. As I argued in chapter 2, labor unions' influence can be highly impactful because they have the capacity to create normative direction in their immediate and broader society (Mundlak, 2020).

In the previous section, I discussed the slowness of labor internationalism, but on the other hand, labor organizations can be highly flexible. If labor unions make internal changes to match the ideas of what organizational work means in the society they are operating in (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), then they may also be able to switch their methods of solidary actions to fit their own and societies perceptions, fairly easily.

6. Discussion

6.1 Problematizing Further

I will devote this section to problematize beyond the analysis above; what it means and what it may imply, and I will begin with the data itself. It must be noted that I have chosen, what I view is, the most important writings and rhetoric from the labor unions sampled. My inevitable bias has played a role here. Although I would argue that sampling in this manner has been crucial to allow decluttering labor unions' own wordings and slogans. By looking beyond this – what Meyer and Rowan (1977) would argue is a difference between the formal structure of an organization and its actual day-to-day activities, I was able to acquire the data and analyze it as presented in this thesis. My intention for this study has been to gather data which would enable me to describe what labor unions claim that they do and stand for, and then describe what they do, empirically.

Furthermore, email interviewing, as described in Burnham et al. (2008), can be perceived as protracted. Due to the limited responses from the email interviews, I was not able to access solid data. The intention with my email interviews was to grasp at any underlying, behind the scenes, notions. And, while I did receive some information, I am confident that there is significantly more data to be acquired on this front. I therefore argue that future research of this kind ought to conduct physical interviews. The potential for rich datasets is huge, compared to the email interviewing method I chose. Due to a lack of data from informal sources, i.e., lack of rich email interviews, I will argue that this study does not answer completely satisfactory the research question posed in Chapter 1. I would have ideally wanted to conduct immersive interviewing and observations of actual operations; that way gaining a more all-encompassing sense of what labor unions say they do and what they do, as seen empirically. I would have, only then, been able to fully discuss the decoupling between their ideals and their empirical practices. There is a decoupling from what labor unions claim to be and do, versus what can be seen empirically, and I have hopefully managed to introduce this phenomenon for further research to...

Nonetheless, even if I would have been able to access better data, it does not mean that it would tell a radically different story, as the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected labor unions to exercise their fullest potential as transnational actors. As Fougner and Kurtoğlu (2011) reported in their research, successful solidary actions were seen by external unions and advocacy groups visiting the city of the Novamed strikes to show support and show workers

solidarity. Physically visiting the Indian farmers has been restricted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and we would have perhaps seen similar activities and outcomes in the Indian farmers' movement context as in the research by Fougner and Kurtoğlu (2011) had there not been a pandemic.

Perhaps labor unions would not function as transnational actors only on the local or national level, had it not been for this pandemic. Keeping Fougner and Kurtoğlu's (2011) study in mind, it may very well be so that some would have traveled to the heart of the Indian farmers' movement. This feeds into Scholz (2008) points on solidarity, where Scholz (2008) argues that "[p]olitical solidarity cannot be separated from a particular situation" (p. 51). The actions, motivations, abilities, and aftermath of the sampled labor unions should not be generalized into universal typologies. It must also be noted that the explanations and analyses in this study may have also be caused by completely random things

Furthermore, there are certainly issues with treating the neoliberal landscape as a fixed overarching collection of rules. Although this landscape poses certain problems for labor unions, it does not mean that the structure itself is unchangeable. Much like labor unions will make internal changes (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), or how individual members will influence the unions (Scholz, 2008), then these entities may likewise influence the neoliberal landscape. Although I argue that the neoliberal landscape affects labor unions' transnational capacities, it is much more complex than a fixed landscape.

There are many aspects which most likely influence labor unions' transnational operations, which I did not research here. I did not deep-dive into the internal structures of labor unions; address these; or how they translate out. I have mostly sought to show similarities among the 28 sampled labor unions. The next step would have been to find out in what ways they differ. Given that I only addressed visible solidarity from formal, national and local unions, it must be noted that there have been many other advocacy groups, grassroots movements, and religious diaspora, which have been vocal and have shown support for the Indian farmers. These have also likely influenced the actions of my sampled labor unions. This essentially also means that labor unions are not the only ones who can safeguard people's rights and needs as workers.

Finally, as the sample size shows (see appendix 2), labor unions in Canada are at the forefront of responding in solidarity to the Indian farmers' movement. It may be caused by a particular transnational labor interest, but it may likewise be caused by other factors, unrelated to labor unionism, such as Canada's large Sikh diaspora.

6.2 Moving Forward

The potential issues and possibilities discussed above lead to addressing potential ways moving forward. I will here discuss what labor unions can do to improve transnational labor union cooperation, and overall, how they could become better international actors. My suggestions below come about from assessing the main parts of this study, and I am certain that there are many other possibilities for improving transnational labor union operations, which I will not address in this section.

I will firstly address building stronger transnational communities. Bieler and Lindberg (2011b) argue that “the challenges of globalization will make necessary new or renewed union structures, where workers can act together across national borders.” (p. 221). Perhaps a renewed international unionism is to foster deeper worker-to-worker relations, excluding and avoiding communicating through large organizational masses. In other words, building stronger and long-lasting communities, those resembling Keck and Sikkink’s (2014) transnational advocacy networks.

As locally situated labor unions operate on low levels (bottom-up) in society, they have an advantage in that they can create networks with more informal or unexpected actors in society (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011b). Noted, most of my 28 sampled labor unions engage with their communities and beyond, however, there may be room to expand transnational networks. Given how labor unions must cooperate with other social movements to successfully fight discrimination, oppression, and inequality (Hyman, 2011), then they should, especially the lower-level unions, focus on building strong ties (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011b).

Such community-building may require resources which many labor unions do not have, but it does not have to be costly in the monetary or in an executionary way. Fostering transnational advocacy networks does not have to be costly, given how the main strategy is information sharing (Keck & Sikkink, 2014). Being smaller, as Bieler and Lindberg (2011b) indicate, can mean to have more possibilities to build strong communities. Through the creation of strong transnational ties with strategic actors, labor union solidarity may go from ornamental in most cases, to renewed. Also, keeping in mind that the transnational solidarity networks which labor unions participate in should be heterogenous so to reach more levels and situations (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011b).

Building stronger communities also means building stronger ties between coalitions and allies, because as Visser (2019) argues, “revitalization involves cooperation and alliances with other social organizations and social forces” (p. 70). Such networks must not only

involve labor-related organizations, as Bieler, Hilary, and Lindberg (2014) argue that “there have been repeated calls for [labor unions] to establish new alliances and structures, both within and outside the trade union movement, to contest the power of transnational capital in the era of globalization” (p. 7). Building community in some of the ways that I have outlined above, will foster capacities to influence norms, locally, nationally, but more importantly, also globally.

I conclude this thesis by discussing potential paths forward which future research of the same kind should consider. By writing this thesis, I have hopefully contributed to pluralizing the field of International Relations. Tickner’s (2013) discussions on the hierarchy of International Relations knowledge production inspired me to challenge the taken-for-granted definitions and conceptualizations within the field. I therefore looked to fields beyond International Relations, such as Industrial Relations, social movement study, and organizational theory. My goal has, thus, been to draw interdisciplinary ideas into the field of International Relations. Given how international labor union movements have been under-theorized (Cotton & Gumbrell-McCormick, 2012), and how very little scholarship has been produced within International Relations on labor unions. I encourage future research on this topic to do the same. My position in International Relations has benefitted the study by treating labor unions as transnational actors with various degrees of influence. This research has contributed with an overview of how non-governmental organizations are important in International Relations.

This has been a macro-level study, however given how solidary actions are so specific to any given context (Scholz, 2008), a projected deep dive into a context may give much bigger understanding as to how actors act as they do, and why. I am firstly hoping to see the Indian farmers’ movement being researched extensively going forward, so that the nuances and complexities of this movement is captured. The short description of the movement presented in this thesis does not do it justice, and the lack of adequate international information outlets on the case makes it even more important to study further. I am hoping to see studies on what I have only used as an illustrative case, because I argue that “[s]eeing through the eyes of the people being studied” (Bryman, 2016, p. 392), is essential for a movement of this scale.

7. Conclusion

This has been a macro-level qualitative study exploring low-level (nationally and locally) based labor unions' transnational capabilities. To guide the research, I asked how national labor unions function as transnational actors, and my question was guided by questions regarding what characterizes labor unions' transnational activities, and what possibilities or constraints they are faced with in the international world. To answer my research question, I firstly outlined the economic landscape which labor unions operate within, followed by a theoretical debate on what labor unions *are*, what they *do*, what their *structure* looks like, what *solidarity* means in a labor unions context, and what *issues* labor unions face internationally. I used the case of the Indian farmers' movement, which began in September of 2020 with the introduction of three new farming-related bills, as an illustrative case to grasp at a contemporary labor issue or international scope.

This research has shown that labor unions appear to function as transnational actors through operations which are situated locally and nationally. They engage in political solidarity (Scholz, 2008), by educating their own members, communities, and nations on issues concerning the Indian farmers' movement, and they also educate broader – people like me. Labor unions show solidarity through solidarity statements – individually and jointly written, and they act as pressure groups toward their governments (Pencavel, 2007). They, furthermore, use normatively loaded language; sometimes resembling diplomatic language. Labor unions do not, however, show signs of having strong international strategies; show strong political solidarity (Scholz, 2008); or create and foster transnational advocacy networks (Keck & Sikkink, 2014).

From my analysis and problematizations, I draw the conclusion that there appears to be unused potential between labor unions across the world, which is why my suggestions for labor unions' transnational operations moving forward is to build community stronger relations with small-scale actors, internationally. Building community, I argue, fosters capacities to influence norms, locally, nationally, but more importantly, globally.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Email template used to contact labor unions in appendix 2

Dear madam/sir,

My name is Sara and I am a MSc student in International Relations at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. I am currently working on my master's thesis which addresses the relationship between labor unions across the world and Indian unions in the context of the current Indian farmers movement.

I am hoping someone with the [union] can answer my question below...

Referring to the press release from the [union] on [date], I am wondering what the [union] means when it says it “stands in solidarity” with the farmers and workers in India? What are the actions (if any) of transnational union solidarity that [union] is involved in within this context?

I look forward to hearing from you. Any answer will be greatly appreciated and treated with the utmost confidentiality and respect!

I thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Sara Narancic

Appendix 2: Sampled labor unions

Canada:

United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW)
Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC)
National Farmers Union (NFU Canada)
Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)
International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)
Unifor – the Union
Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE)
Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW)
National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE)
Hospital Employees' Union (HEU)
Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF)
Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL)
Peel Regional Labour Council (PRLC)
Health Sciences Association (HSA)
BCGEU
The United Steelworkers Canada Local 2009

United States:

National Farmers Union (NFU U.S.)
The Health, Environment, Agriculture and Labor (HEAL) Food Alliance

British Isles:

GMB Union
National Education Union (NEU)
UNISON – the Public Service Union
Land Workers' Alliance
Unite the Union
Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB)
The Bakers Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU)
Trades Union Congress (TUC)
Fire Brigades Union

Appendix 3: Indian labor unions and their Twitter handles

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS)

- Twitter: @KisanSabha

All Indian Kisan Sangharsh Coordination Committee (AIKSCC)

- Twitter: @aikscc

Bharatiya Kisan Union

- Twitter: @OfficialBKU

Kisan Ekta Morcha

- Twitter: @Kisanektamorcha

Kisan Swaraj Sangathan

- Twitter: @KisanSwaraj_



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