

CHAPTER 9

LABOUR POWER

Can workers shape economic geographies?

Aims

- To recognize the ways in which capital's mobility gives it bargaining power over labour
- To appreciate the range of mechanisms used by states and firms to control labour
- To understand the different geographical strategies that workers may use to improve their position
- To reflect on the possibilities for alternative or non-capitalist labour geographies.

9.1 Introduction

In the mid-1990s, the Argentinian economy was being widely lauded as a success story. In a series of economic reforms initiated in 1989, the economy had been opened up, state industries privatized, and the currency was fixed to the US dollar. The result was a huge influx of foreign investment and growth rates of around 8 per cent in the early 1990s. By late 2001, however, the situation was very different. The fixed exchange rate had become a hindrance, making Argentinian goods expensive. Poverty levels were at an all-time high, and the unemployment rate was estimated to be topping 30 per cent. Argentina was struggling to repay its private sector debts, and, on 14 November 2002, failed to make a debt repayment to the World Bank. While it repaid the interest – about US\$80 million – it could not repay the entire debt, which stood at around US\$800 million. The country was in a state of political and economic turmoil.

In the midst of this confusion, however, a new social movement became evident. Across the country, workers started to take control of abandoned or

struggling factories, and put them back into operation. In October 2001, the Zanón Ceramics factory was occupied by its laid-off workers. In December 2001, in perhaps the best-known case, the Brukman garment factory in Buenos Aires – the capital of Argentina – was abandoned by its owners and taken over by its workers. In some cases, the occupation was peaceful, while others resulted in direct confrontation with the authorities. In the Brukman case, the workers were forcibly evicted by police officers in April 2003, and did not return to the factory until later that year. By mid-2004, it was estimated that there were some 200 worker-run factories in Argentina across a wide range of sectors from bread-making to metal-smelting. In the most successful cases, sales and profits have increased, and worker salaries have seen substantial increases. The future of the movement is not entirely certain, however: while some have achieved official status as worker cooperatives, others remain in a state of legal limbo, facing challenges from former owners and local government. Some cooperatives have started collaborating together, and they have become part of a wider movement across Latin America – in mid-2004, there were an estimated 100 such factories in Brazil and 20 in Uruguay. In Brazil, since 1994, the factories have been formally organized through the National Association of Worker-Managed Enterprises (ANTEAG). The Argentinian movement proved the inspiration for a critically acclaimed 2004 documentary by Naomi Klein (the well-known anti-globalization author and journalist) and Avi Lewis entitled, *The Take: Occupy. Resist. Produce* (Figure 9.1).

This example illustrates the key arguments that run through the chapter. It shows how workers in particular places are increasingly exposed to the forces of global competition, and policy choices made by governments and supranational organizations. The actions of the factory workers, however, reveal that even within the confines of a global capitalist economy, workers have the ability to intervene and alter the course of events. The emergence of coordinated networks of factories both in Argentina, but also more formally in Brazil, illustrates the potential for worker groups to organize their activities at various geographical scales other than the workplace and the locality. Finally, the advent of worker-owned and managed factories hints at alternative ways of organizing labour other than the standard employer–employee relationship inherent to capitalism.

In developing these arguments, the chapter is structured into four main sections. Next, we explore the general account of how capital's spatial mobility in the contemporary era gives it a strong bargaining position with respect to place-bound workers (Section 9.2). While there is a large element of truth in this story, it is actually an over-simplification of real processes. Second, we review the range of mechanisms and policies that firms and states can use to extract concessions from workers (Section 9.3). These labour controls come together in different places in very different ways, and with different outcomes. Third, and moving on from viewing labour in this rather passive way, we then turn to look at the active role of workers within the economy (Section 9.4). We will look

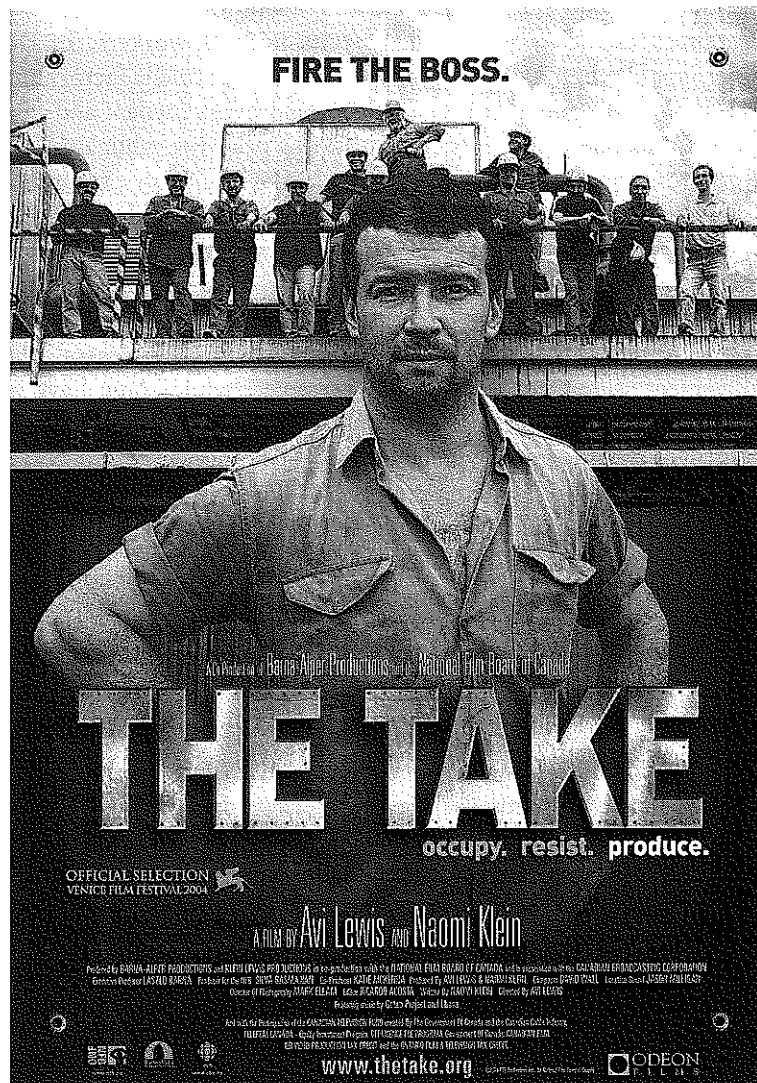


Figure 9.1 *The Take*

Source: *Occupy. Resist. Produce.* A film by Avi Lewis & Naomi Klein (© 2004).

at examples of how labour can assert itself through a number of inherently geographical strategies: by moving between places, by acting in place, and by connecting across places. Fourth, we finish by considering the potential of alternative ways of working that are not based around free market exchange and waged labour (Section 9.5). The central argument that drives the analysis is that in working collectively, labour can become an important and active agent helping to shape contemporary economic geographies.

9.2 Global Capital, Local Labour?

We start by reviewing the popular account of the position of labour in global capitalism. The basic argument is that a defining characteristic of contemporary capitalism is the *relative* geographic mobility of capital compared to that of labour, which in turn gives the former tremendous bargaining power when negotiating with the latter. In particular, the persistent threat that corporations may relocate production becomes a powerful tool for employers when determining wages and benefits, contracts, investment strategies and the like with employees. In this way, the *potential* reorganization of the activities of transnational corporations on a global scale (see Chapter 8) becomes a critical tool for firms negotiating with workers and local interest groups. Workers, in turn, become increasingly pressured into having to defend their interests in particular places, and in the process may enter into direct wage competition with workers in other places in a bid to secure jobs. This inter-place competition fosters a progressive ratcheting-down of labour terms and conditions as mobile capital seeks out the best rates of return, a process sometimes known as the 'race to the bottom'.

This competition can occur at the inter-national and/or sub-national scales. The UK and Spain may compete, for example, to host a new Japanese car manufacturing plant to serve the European market. Equally, locations within those countries may also be drawn into competition with one another in order to attract much-needed investment. National, regional and local governments may become embroiled in this competitive dynamic, offering up large sums of public money in the form of incentives in a bid to secure investments. To give one example, in 1993, the US state of Alabama offered what was then Mercedes-Benz some US\$250m in incentives to secure a car plant in competition with other Southern states; this amounted to US\$167,000 per job created. Overall, this competitive bidding for employment is put forward by commentators on both the left and right of the political spectrum. From the perspective of neoclassical economics, this competition-driven system is a route to efficiency gains through globalization that will generate benefits for all. From a more critical, Marxist perspective, it constitutes a neoliberal economy in which labour is subordinated to employers in a process that undermines labour standards and salaries (see Box 9.1 for a range of viewpoints on labour and labour markets).

The general thrust of this account is persuasive. The geographic mobility of capital certainly *has* increased over the last few decades, due to a number of overlapping factors. *Deregulation*, as seen in the lowering of barriers to international trade and foreign direct investment, increasingly enables the transfer of both finished goods and the factors of production (i.e. materials, technologies, people, and capital) (see Chapter 7). Dramatic improvements in productive,

Box 9.1 Different perspectives on labour and labour markets

Three broad approaches to understanding labour and labour markets can usefully be identified here. It should be noted that each approach is, in reality, a cluster of related approaches rather than the homogeneous entities we depict here. Contemporary economic geography tends to be critical of the neo-classical worldview and instead combine facets of the Marxist and institutional perspectives (see Martin, 2000, for further details):

- 1 The *neo-classical approach* emphasizes the free market as the key mechanism for matching the supply of, and demand for, labour as with any other 'commodity'. In this idealized world, workers simply 'sell' their services to employers. Employers benefit from the workers' capacity to labour for a finite period, while workers get wages that allow them to purchase the commodities they need to live and prosper. Equilibrium is reached and the labour markets 'clear' (i.e. everyone finds a job) through price adjustments and the basic laws of supply and demand. Not all workers are equal, however. Different skill levels, for example, are reflected in different wage levels as determined by the open market. When markets do not clear, market imperfections (such as unemployment and job vacancies) are attributed to various barriers to the efficient working of the labour market (e.g. government intervention). Individual workers, meanwhile, are seen as rational individuals seeking to get the best deal from their employers.
- 2 The *Marxist approach* is highly critical of the neo-classical perspective. A Marxist viewpoint sees the emphasis upon unregulated and apolitical labour markets as highly unrealistic. In capitalism, the worker-employer relationship is, in principle at least, a contested affair. The labour market is a site of struggle, not a forum of free exchange. Building upon this, Marxists view capitalism as an inherently unequal system in which profits are derived through workers being paid less than the value of the goods they make. This means that the neo-classical idea of the market as a neutral means of exchange hides the exploitation that goes on daily in the workplace, and says little about social power and resistance within society. For Marxists then, exploitation pits workers against capitalists in both theory and practice. Contrary to the neo-classical vision of sovereign individuals buying and selling labour power, Marxists see a more collective politics of labour where class interests shape individual interest and actions.

- 3 The *institutional approach* focuses on the role of institutions in economic life. An advocate would argue that, in both neo-classical economics and to a lesser extent in the Marxian approach, economic life tends to be abstracted from its socio-political and cultural context. Institutions are best thought of as generally accepted rules and regulations that shape human behaviour, and which are either policed by individuals themselves, or by some kind of external authority. It is helpful to distinguish between the institutional *environment* (rules, customs, routines, etc.) and institutional *arrangements* (organizational forms such as markets, firms, unions etc.). Labour markets are thus seen as a set of social institutions which – importantly for economic geographers – will vary in nature from place to place due to differences in employment practices, workplace norms, work cultures and labour traditions. Work in this area is concerned with revealing how both local and non-local institutions intersect to shape local employment, wage and welfare conditions.

transport and communications technologies have facilitated increasingly complex geographic arrangements of production and the rapid global circulation of financial capital (see Chapters 5 and 8). Together, these deregulatory and technological dynamics have increased the intensity of inter-place competition. Technologies, for example, have contributed to productivity growth that has often outstripped the expansion of markets, thereby enhancing cost-competition. Deregulation, on the other hand, may both increase competition in a firm's home market by facilitating the entry of foreign firms, and increase opportunities abroad for domestic enterprises.

At the same time, we also can think of a number of ways in which working and labouring are attached to particular places:

- *the daily commute*: the majority of workers do not have the time or financial resources to travel far to work. While in advanced capitalist economies the average commute can be as high as 100km or more per day, the vast majority of the world's labour lives in much closer proximity to the workplace. Put simply, 'labour-power has to go home every night' (Harvey, 1989: 19).
- *labour reproduction*: the reproduction of labour is also necessarily local. The various institutions of everyday life and communities such as the family, church, school, clubs and so on, all develop over time in particular places.
- *place attachments*: as labour is unlike other commodities, it has the propensity to develop place-attachments or place-identities. The notion of 'home-place' points to this intensely local dimension to many people's sense of themselves.

Places may become sites of familiarity, routine, affection and friendships. These emotional ties to place can be hard to break.

- *the grounding of production*: all production activities are necessarily local. For the vast majority of paid workers, production occurs at fixed sites. Even the largest TNCs, while *relatively* more mobile than most small businesses, for example, must still combine labour, materials and technology in particular workplaces.
- *regulation*: the regulation of workers is always expressed and experienced locally. Even where the regulatory institutions are national (e.g. a national trade union) or international (e.g. the European Union or the North American Free Trade Agreement) their regulatory mechanisms must ultimately be articulated at the local scale.

In sum, there are clearly a number of strong place attachments for workers and their families to be contrasted with the enhanced mobility of capital.

However, the argument we will develop in the remainder of this chapter is that this general thesis is somewhat overstated. Accepting it as a blanket characterization of the position of all workers in contemporary capitalism has two problems. First, it obscures the social and spatial variations in the incidence of these conditions. Socially, we can think of inter-sectoral differences. While harsh inter-place wage-based competition may characterize the garment industry, it clearly bears little resemblance to the dynamics of the legal profession. Even within individual firms or commodity chains, it is usually only certain kinds of workers (e.g. manufacturing or routine administration staff) who are subject to this kind of competition. Spatially, we can think of different scales of variation. At the scale of the *macro-region*, regional blocs differ in the extent to which they institute protections for labour rights and protections. For example, the European Union (EU) is generally seen to be more progressive than the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in this regard. *National* labour systems with different institutional and cultural histories will vary greatly in the extent to which they safeguard workers. Table 9.1 contrasts the deregulated, neoliberal American model with Japanese and European systems that offer more support to workers and worker groups. Taking the example of employment systems, we can see how these range from short-term employment relationships forged outside of the firm in a competitive market context (the American way) to long-term employment relationships dominated by slow progression within individual firms (the Japanese way). Within national territories, there is considerable *place variation* in the character of labour-capital relations. Places represent unique coalescences of firms, workers and institutions: no two local labour markets are exactly alike, and the precise problems and possibilities facing workers vary accordingly. Second, it serves to obscure the potential for worker intervention in the global economy, an issue we shall return to shortly.

Table 9.1 Different national labour conditions: three ideal types

| | The American Way | The Japanese Way | The European Way |
|---------------------------|---|--|---|
| Economic structures | Low-skilled, price competitive approach Downward pressure on wages from cost sensitivity to international competition | Flexible system, combining scope and scale economies High, but firm-specific skills | High-skill, high-wage economy, based on non-price competitive goods and services Extensive human capital investment |
| Employment practices | Short-term employment relationships Market-led employment adjustment through external labour market Individualised and competitive employment relations | Long-term employment relationships Confinement of core workers to internal labour markets Slow, internalised labour market adjustment | Medium-term employment relationships High standards of employment protection Macroeconomic stabilisation of employment levels |
| Economic and social norms | 'Market' work ethic Increasing working time combined with low productivity growth, and falling investments in human capital High levels of labour market inequality | 'Corporate' work ethic Acceptance of long working hours Submission to corporate authority Implicit socially encoded rules of managerial dominance | 'Social' work ethic Declining working time Low inequality Universalised basic income levels |
| Industrial relations | Market based Individualistic ethos De-unionized, human resource management (HRM) approach | Ethos of culturally and institutionally embedded trust, cooperation and compliance Enterprise unionism | State-articulated regulation of economic and political relations Institutionalized rights of employment Unions conferred with public status |

Source: Abridged version of Peck (1996: 246-7).

9.3 Geographies of Labour: Working under Pressure

Notwithstanding the above discussion, it is undoubtedly true that workers in contemporary capitalism are faced with a broad range of labour control mechanisms that either threaten to erode the terms and conditions under which they work, or worse still, remove their opportunity to work at all. In this section we review the range of different mechanisms that can be used by both firms and states in this regard, before moving on to look at how they work out on the ground in various localities in Southeast Asia.

Firm and state strategies for labour control

Many of the most detrimental dynamics for workers come about as a result of firm restructuring and reorganization. Firms seek to manage strategically their workforce in pursuit of profits. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter 3 through the notion of spatial divisions of labour, firms often initially establish operations in particular places to access certain types of labour, with labour costs, levels of skills and productivity, and the relative degree of militancy and collective representation, being important variables in such decisions. In the call centre industry, for example, employers may seek out pools of cheap and weakly organized female workers in relatively peripheral regions (part of a broader pattern that we will examine more closely in Chapter 12). In some instances, groups of migrant workers may be similarly exploited due to their need for work and relative lack of local social contacts.

Some of the restructuring strategies pursued by firms relate to firms altering the *scale* of operations in particular places. Most obviously perhaps, firms may simply decide to relocate production to another locality. Increasingly, as part of broader globalization processes, production is being moved offshore. Attempts by displaced workers to find jobs on similar pay and conditions locally may be complicated by sectoral shifts – such as that from manufacturing to service employment – which may result in mismatches between workforce skills and the demands of the local economy. In reality, however, the decision to ‘up and leave’ a place completely is one very rarely taken by firms. Instead, firms are more likely to change the scale of operations in a particular place, or, in the case of multi-plant firms, alter the balance of activity *between* various locations. Again, such decisions are increasingly taken at the global scale.

Another method which firms may use to downsize operations in a locality is to *externalize* certain activities that are subsequently secured from suppliers or through subcontractors. In such situations, workers may find themselves working for worse pay and conditions due to increased competition between suppliers. In some instances, such as in garment manufacturing in both developed

and developing world cities, retrograde forms of weakly regulated labour such as home-working and informal work can emerge.

Other firm strategies, however, involve changing the *nature* of operations in particular places. As suggested in Chapter 5, technological change is crucial here. New production technologies may lead to the replacement of workers and result in job losses (e.g. automation of an assembly task) or they may alter the labour process for the workers involved (e.g. moving from paper to computer-based systems). While some view this process positively, suggesting that repetitive tasks are replaced and skilled positions are created, critics suggest that some new technologies have simply increased the potential for worker surveillance and monitoring in a more mundane way. Worker performance in call centres, for example, is often monitored by recording phone conversations with clients. Closely related to the implementation of new technologies, firms may seek to intensify the labour process of their employees in other ways. Examples include moving to new and extended shift systems, the increased use of overtime, the lowering or ending of barriers between different jobs (known as multi-skilling), and the use of a range of more flexible employment contracts such as part-time, short-term and temporary working.

These technology and work intensification strategies may also be accompanied by attempts to constrain the activities of unions within the workplace. Employers may simply ban unions completely in the workplace, they may establish one-union rather than multi-union workplaces, they may insist on workplace bargaining and dispute resolution as opposed to collective bargaining at larger spatial scales, and they may establish worker-management councils within the workplace to try and negate the need for union representation. Moreover, in their negotiations with workers and worker groups, they may pursue concessionary bargaining strategies in which they seek to freeze, and in some cases reduce, wages. Important discursive strategies come into play here as firms can emphasize the perils of global cost competition and the threat of relocation during negotiations. The term *lean production* has been used to describe the nature of the production system in contexts where most or all of these various mechanisms coincide (Box 9.2).

These various processes of corporate restructuring may be supported – or not, as the case may be – by state and quasi-state bodies at a range of scales. In particular, as we demonstrated in Chapter 7, the national state remains of critical importance in any analysis of global capitalism. One group of strategies relate to how the economy is regulated, with a dominant trend in many contexts being towards deregulation. As we mentioned earlier, by removing or lowering regulatory barriers to trade, foreign direct investment and the movement of people, technologies and capital, states (and quasi-state bodies such as the WTO and IMF) are creating conditions that allow capital to be switched between places at the international scale. At the same time, the re-scaling of economic development and place marketing functions to the subnational or local level

Box 9.2 *Lean production*

In reality, many different corporate practices are used together to control the workforce. This coalescence of strategies has resulted in a new form of production system often termed *lean production*. The essence of lean production – which originated in Japan in the post-war period and has subsequently spread widely – is that it combines economies of scale with economies of scope derived from various practices of *flexibility*. Three types of flexibility are encapsulated in lean production. First, *functional* flexibility concerns increased levels of job rotation and multi-skilling. Second, *numerical* flexibility reflects a growing use of contracting-out and part-time and casual labour. Third, *temporal* flexibility describes the move to new forms of shift patterns (such as 24-hour working) and overtime. These changing working patterns are often combined with the very latest productive technologies. While proponents choose to emphasize that these processes enhance product and process innovation, critics argue that flexibility is most often implemented to facilitate cost reductions. Despite seemingly positive descriptors such as ‘quality management’ and ‘team-working’, these changes are not simply about worker empowerment, but also about the micro-management of workers’ time and activities, a system that might be described as ‘management-by-stress’ (Moody, 1997: 87). New forms of groupings designed to increase worker input to the production process such as teams and job circles can actually serve to bypass unions, or avoid them altogether. In some situations, workers and their representatives are forced to develop proposals to reduce costs and improve quality in competition with other plants. The usual outcome of lean production is a combination of job losses, and increased work and time pressure on the primary workforce. For more, see Moody (1997).

(explained in Chapter 7) means that places within the same country are often competing for inward investment.

More specifically, states may choose to alter the nature of their regulatory intervention in labour markets. For example, they may seek to enhance the flexibility of labour markets through removing constraints on labour mobility between jobs or by using toughened legislation to constrain the activities of unions, for example. Another component of a move to labour market flexibility may be to change the nature of support available to those without work. Some industrialized countries such as the USA and the UK are seeing welfare systems replaced by so-called *workfare* systems in which the unemployed are enrolled into a variety of temporary training schemes and low-end jobs in order to ‘earn’ their benefit payments and hopefully secure long-term employment.

Finally, we must not forget the fact that the state remains a massive employer in most countries, with three important implications. First, any moves to shrink the public sector may result in redundancies (e.g. rationalization of the civil service). Second, the contracting-out of certain activities (e.g. catering, security or IT services) to external providers brings into play the same range of dynamics considered above in the context of firms. Third, the wholesale privatization of previously government-owned industries (e.g. utilities such as water, gas and electricity) can similarly expose more workers to the forces of inter-firm competition.

Labour control in action: new industrial spaces in Southeast Asia

Workers, then, face a wide range of corporate and state strategies in their bid to make a living in the global economy. Figure 9.2 summarizes these various overlapping dynamics and their impacts on workers and labour markets. But

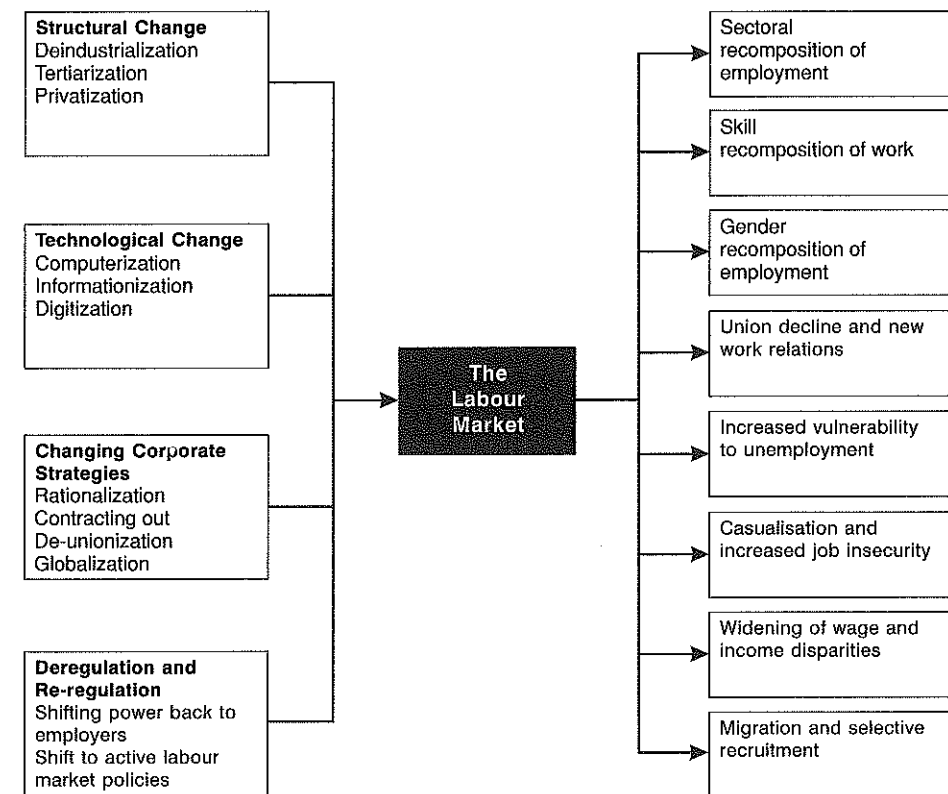


Figure 9.2 Forces of labour market restructuring
Source: Adapted from Martin and Morrison (2003), Figure 1.1.

how do these forces interact and play out on the ground? This question can only really be effectively answered from an economic-geographical perspective. Geography is important here in two ways. First, as we shall see shortly, strategies of labour control are innately spatial and operate at multiple spatial scales. Second, different strategies come together in distinct combinations in particular places to create unique local labour control regimes (Box 9.3). These two dimensions can be illustrated by considering labour control in the industrial estates and export processing zones of three localities in Southeast Asia (Kelly, 2002).

Box 9.3 *Local labour control regimes*

The *local labour control regime* (LLCR) is a useful concept for understanding the inherently place-based nature of economic activity. The development of LLCRs is driven by one of the basic contradictions of capitalism, namely that which exists between the *potential* spatial mobility of many firms, and their associated bargaining power, and the need for firms to extract profits from concrete investments in particular localities, which requires a certain measure of stability. An LLCR is the place and time-specific set of mechanisms – social relations, norms, rules and habits – that coordinate the links between production, work, consumption and reproduction in particular localities (Jonas, 1996). Importantly, this formulation extends beyond the workplace to incorporate the domains of consumption (housing, recreation, household consumption etc.) and reproduction (education, training, health care, welfare etc.). It naturally follows that the full range of worker, household, firm, civil society and state institutions are – or at least may be – involved in shaping the LLCR. In part, a LLCR constitutes the unique, place-specific relations between firms, workers, unions and regulatory institutions that enable workers to be integrated into a production system. At the same time, it is also shaped by multi-scalar processes, and there are a broad range of extra-local worker, employer and regulatory connections that will influence its character. Put another way, every local regime is ‘nested’ within labour control regimes operating at larger scales that will influence, *but not determine*, the nature of employer–worker relations in that particular locality. Of particular importance is the way in which the regime is integrated into production systems organized at the national and international scales that actively seek to take advantage of the differences between various regimes (e.g. in terms of labour costs, skills, unionization rates). The global capitalist economy is characterized by a bewildering variety of different LLCRs. Even within the same country and the same industry, the differences may be profound. In the US computer industry, the highly flexible innovative labour regime of Silicon Valley, California, is reputedly very different from the regime dominated by large firms found in the Route 128 area near

Boston, Massachusetts (see Chapter 11). A corollary of this great variability is that the problems and possibilities facing workers will differ dramatically between different places. After all, it is only certain kinds of businesses that benefit from inter-locality flows of investment and aggressive spatial restructuring. Others serve to benefit far more from becoming progressively involved in the LLCR on a long-term basis.

Cavite and Laguna (The Philippines), Penang (Malaysia) and Batam (Indonesia) share several important features: high levels of female employment in light manufacturing and assembly work in the electronics and garments industries; substantial inward foreign direct investment from North America, Western Europe and leading East and Southeast Asian economies; strong state provision of locational and export incentives; and very low levels of unionization. Five distinct spatial strategies of labour control are apparent in these industrializing localities. First, labour control is evident at the level of *the individual*. This can be seen in the way that employers try to establish individual relations with workers rather than allowing collective representation – through unions, for example – and also in the use of dormitories and hostels to provide a tightly controlled and regulated non-work environment in which workers may be offered counselling and a range of religious, educational and sporting activities. Second, *the workplace* is a site of labour control. Where collective organization is allowed, labour relations are usually confined to the factory level through the use of in-house unions and labour-management councils. This is to prevent independent trade unions from operating across different workplaces and firms, which may facilitate the comparison of wages and working conditions.

Third, *the industrial estate* is another scale of labour containment. Estate management companies provide services to tenants that go way beyond infrastructural provision, including tight security, establishing and maintaining worker databases identifying non-union employees, undertaking employer–worker mediation, and fostering links and contacts to local politicians. In this way, estate management companies actively seek to maintain their jurisdictions as union-free spaces. Fourth, as described earlier, *national regulatory policies* can also serve to constrain worker organization, through trade union legislation. This may not be through legislation that bans unionization outright, but more likely through highly bureaucratic and sector-specific registration processes that present an effective barrier to worker organization. Fifth, different *spaces of migration* can be identified which allow employers flexibility and promote labour cooperation. Employing workers either from other regions of the country or from abroad can provide employers with a flexible workforce that is often disinclined to change jobs (or may be prevented from changing jobs through the conditions of their work visa) and is insulated from the distractions of family or social life. Such workers may also be highly motivated by the desire to send

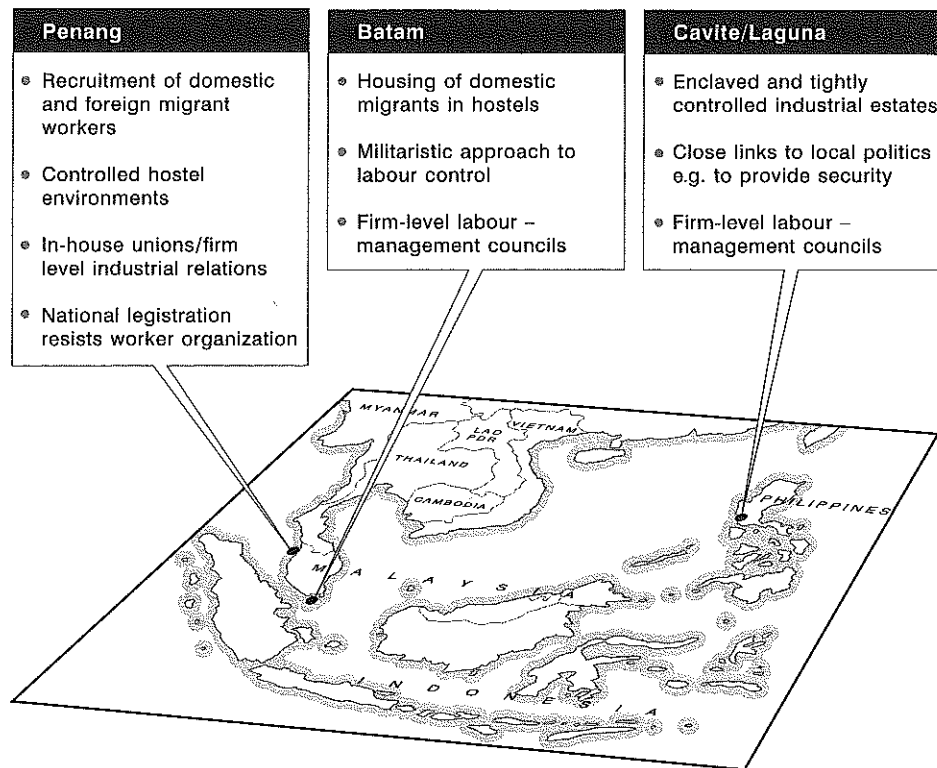


Figure 9.3 Labour control regimes in Southeast Asia

money home to their families. In sum, in these localities a compliant workforce is delivered through the combination of different corporate and state spatial strategies of labour control.

The precise configuration of these different strategies, however, is quite distinct in each of the three localities, thereby illustrating our second geographical dimension to labour control (Figure 9.3). In Penang (Malaysia), the use of domestic and foreign migrant workers is common, as is their accommodation in carefully controlled hostel environments. In-house unions and firm-level industrial relations combine to keep disputes at the factory level, while national legislation provides a strong barrier to worker organization at larger scales. In Batam (Indonesia), the housing of domestic migrants in hostels, supported by a militaristic approach to preventing organization, has provided an effective system of control (Figure 9.4). In Cavite and Laguna (Philippines), it is the enclaved nature of industrial estates as carefully controlled spaces combined with strategic links into local politics that facilitate labour control, rather than migrant labour, hostel spaces or national legislation. There is clearly geographic variability in the relative importance of different strategies of labour control in each of the



Figure 9.4 Worker dormitories in Batam, Indonesia
Source: The authors.

localities. By inference, this variability can be extended to export processing zones in Mexico, China, India and beyond. Recognizing and understanding these differences is the first step towards a more progressive understanding of the role of labour in the global economy. It is to this topic that we now turn.

9.4 Labour Geographies: Workers as an Agent of Change

Arguably what is needed is a shift from thinking about *geographies of labour* – i.e. how workers are distributed through space and how they are affected by the dynamics of the global economy to a notion of *labour geographies* that enables us to conceptualize workers not merely as a factor of production similar to capital, equipment or raw materials, but as thinking beings who actively shape economic geographies through their interventions (Herod, 1997). This is not to argue that labour is the only force shaping contemporary economic geographies: such a stance would clearly be nonsensical in the light of the various powers of labour control available to both firms and governments illustrated above. Rather, it is to recognize that workers do have the ability (or *agency*) to work to improve their relative position and at the same time re-shape the economic geographies around us.

Indeed, two inherent characteristics of contemporary capitalism offer potential for such interventions. First, however mobile capital may be in theory, all economic activity is ultimately grounded in particular workplaces, and there are a number of prohibitive costs that firms will incur when leaving a locality (e.g. redundancy and pension payments to workers, losses on immovable plant and equipment). Second, the world economy is characterized by a tremendous variety of inter-place connections and interdependencies, many of which are highly time- and space-sensitive due to the application of new information and communication technologies. This creates sometimes unexpected vulnerabilities on the part of employers, and the possibility for geographical action by workers. In the remainder of this section, we illustrate four different spatial strategies: proactive migration, resistance within the workplace, acting in a locality both alone and in coalitions, and mobilizations of workers across different places.

On the move: proactive migration strategies

One strategy through which some workers can assert their agency to try and improve their working and living conditions is to migrate. Migration comes in many varied forms: temporary or permanent, internal to a country or international, legal or undocumented, skilled or unskilled, and proactive or reactive. Here we choose to focus on a form of migration that it is a salient characteristic of the contemporary global economy, namely the voluntary or proactive international movement of high-skilled workers over a variety of timeframes (we will look at some less progressive forms of international migration in Chapter 13). Professional labour migration of this kind has expanded dramatically over the past 20 years as part of broader globalization dynamics (Figure 9.5). In some cases, this migration is the result of organized overseas secondment and assignment schemes within transnational corporations, as are common, for example, in the financial services sector. In other cases, migration is the result of individual and family livelihood strategies, and may be linked to the pursuit of overseas education opportunities.

We can illustrate different forms of professional migration through looking at the information technology (IT) industries of the Pacific Rim. Skilled immigrants play an increasingly significant role in the economic development of Silicon Valley, California: currently over one-third of scientists and engineers in Silicon Valley's high-technology workforce are foreign-born, with the majority being of Asian descent (Saxenian, 1999). By 1998, immigrant-run technology companies (started since 1980) accounted for more than US\$16.8bn in sales and 58,000 jobs. There were 2,001 firms led by an ethnic Chinese manager and 774 by an ethnic Indian manager, together accounting for 24 per cent of the total number of firms. The continued success and dynamism of Silicon Valley is thus increasingly based on trans-Pacific flows of highly skilled migrants – particularly from

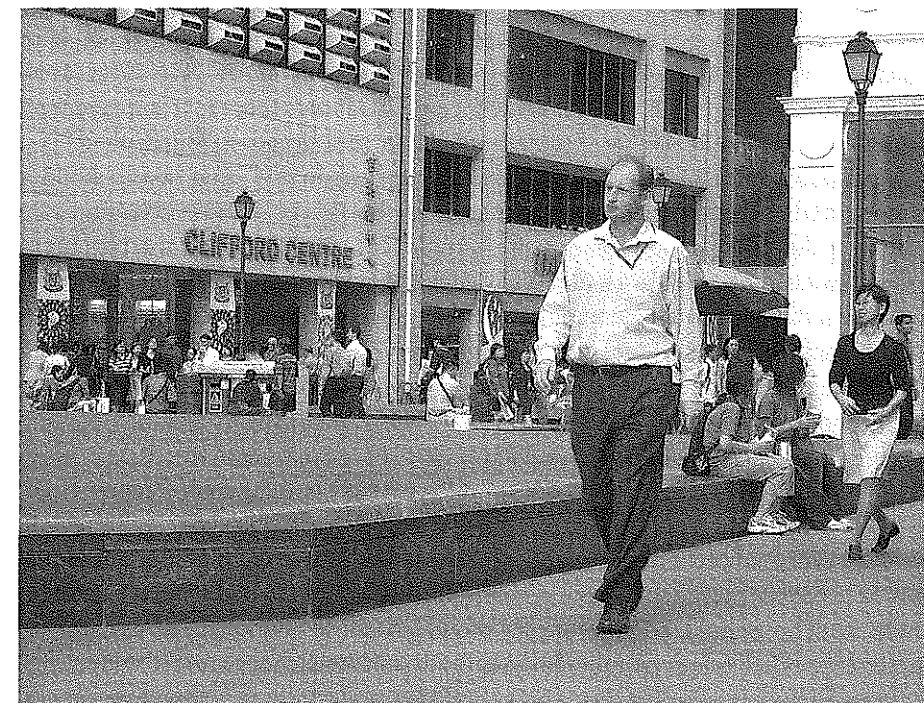


Figure 9.5 Skilled workers on the move: 'foreign talent' in Singapore's financial district

Source: The authors.

Taiwan, India and China, but also in much lesser numbers from Vietnam, the Philippines, Japan and Korea – who contribute both directly to the economy, as engineers and entrepreneurs, and indirectly, as traders and middlemen linking California to the technologically advanced areas of Asia. While the success of Asian migrants in Silicon Valley in parts rests upon their ability to integrate themselves into local technology and business networks, there has also been an ongoing 'globalization' of Silicon Valley's ethnic networks. Many of the new firms set up by immigrant entrepreneurs are 'global' actors from the outset, with the ability to use ethnic network connections to access Asian sources of capital, development skills and markets.

Such links are especially apparent between the technology communities of Silicon Valley and Taiwan's predominant technology region, Hsinchu (Hsu and Saxenian, 2000). The key actors are a cohort of US-educated Taiwanese engineers who have the experience and language skills to operate effectively in both regions. This community is constituted by three international migration flows. First, there is the continued flow of Taiwanese migrants to the US, and Silicon Valley in particular, seeking educational and economic opportunities. Second, there are now increasing numbers of returnees to Taiwan, who have become an

integral part of the technology industries of Hsinchu. Many immigrants have returned to Taiwan to start businesses there while keeping close links with former colleagues and classmates in Silicon Valley. Return migration grew appreciably in the 1980s (200 engineers and scientists per year on average) and accelerated in the 1990s (1,000 per year in mid-decade). Third, there is a growing population of circulatory migrants or 'astronauts' that work in *both* regions. With families based on either side of the Pacific – most commonly in California due to lifestyle factors – these engineers travel between the two areas as often as once or twice a month. They include Taiwanese 'angel' investors and venture capitalists as well as managers and engineers from firms with operations in both regions. The 'bridge' between Silicon Valley and Hsinchu is thus constituted by a combination of permanent, temporary and transient highly skilled international migrants.

'Office politics': action within the workplace

Some forms of labour agency manifest themselves at the scale of the individual (and/or groups of workers within a workplace) and are shaped by the particular family and household configurations of which those workers are a part. All employer-worker relations inherently embody tensions concerning a wide range of issues including worker autonomy, training and skills development, wages, working hours, promotion opportunities, job security, job status, non-wage benefits and workplace facilities. We have already seen the various strategies that employers may use to extract concessions from workers *in situ*. Yet, workers also have their own resistance strategies which can be used to either support or contest employer strategies. These strategies can vary along three key dimensions. First, they may either *proactively* initiate debate with employers or *reactively* respond to employer actions. Second, they may be either *official* or *unofficial*, depending on whether they operate within approved industrial relations frameworks and laws or not. Third, they may be either *physical* (e.g. striking or working to rule) or *non-physical* (e.g. using persuasion and bargaining). In many cases, and mirroring the interconnecting labour control strategies implemented by states and firms, workers will use a combination of resistance strategies at the same time.

An excellent example of such activities is provided by the coping strategies employed by women working in the Jamaican information-processing industry (Mullings, 1999). The industry exports a range of services associated with the collection, transmission, storage and processing of information, using information and communications technologies, to mainly US clients. Often working out of the Export Processing Zones of Kingston and Montego Bay, the activities undertaken by these Jamaican subcontractors range from simple data entry work for magazine subscriptions to software localization. Growth in the sector – as in other Caribbean states – has been driven by the wage savings of up to 90 per

cent that can be secured by US firms using data entry clerks, secretaries and telephone operators located in Jamaica. Some 90 per cent of the workforce is female – with the highest concentrations in the data entry rather than management strata – and the average age is only 25. In short, the Jamaican data processing industry mobilizes a workforce of non-unionized, low-wage female workers. As in the Southeast Asian examples recounted earlier, labour control is enacted through a range of practices including premises designed to obscure workers from the public gaze and prevent interaction, strict control on toilet and drinks breaks, and close electronic monitoring of worker productivity and accuracy.

The worker-manager relation in this context is clearly one of constant tension. While few workers have overtly resisted work conditions, many have engaged in acts of everyday resistance that may hamper the ability of firms to meet contractual deadlines for their clients. Examples include absenteeism, working to rule, rejecting overtime when offered, and 'finger dragging' (that is, deliberately slowing the work-rate when basic targets have been met). These are activities that can actually reduce the wages that workers receive, and may indeed put their employment in the industry in danger. The viability of these strategies – and the psychological boost that workers may receive from them – can only be understood in terms of the role of the extended family in the Jamaican context. Again, geography clearly matters – seen here in place-specific forms of household organization – in shaping worker actions. The basic wages earned in the information processing industry are not enough to meet the income needs of a family. Hence, many families survive by pooling a variety of resources: money received from overseas family members (known as *remittances*), formal wages, and by exchanging unpaid services within and between family groups. It is these collective household economies (see also Chapter 13) that cushion the effects of the low wages and harsh discipline of the information-processing industry, and make viable a series of workplace resistance and coping strategies that at first glance seem illogical.

Defending place: worker actions in situ

Despite the apparent global mobility of capital, workers still have considerable potential to protect jobs and livelihoods in particular localities. Indeed, the geographical mobility and spread of large employers can make them especially vulnerable to certain kinds of worker action. An excellent example of such *in situ* action occurred at the General Motors (GM) plants in Flint, Michigan, in 1998 (Herod, 2000). Flint, like many other places in the so-called North American rustbelt, lost several thousand manufacturing jobs during the 1980s and 1990s, placing great strain on local communities. The large employers that remained sought to implement more flexible systems of lean production (Box 9.2) in their factories, often with negative impacts on working conditions,

overtime pay and shift patterns. In particular, they sought to impose low inventory just-in-time production systems (see Chapter 5) to cut costs and improve efficiency. Workers at two GM plants in Flint were unhappy both with these changes and with the low levels of investment made by GM in the factories, and they decided to take strike action. The *local* nature of strike action was critical for the United Auto Workers (UAW) union to which the workers belonged: a national strike would have been illegal under US labour law, and as such the UAW may have become liable for any costs incurred by GM. As a result, the UAW was clear from the outset that it was local workplace terms and conditions that were at stake.

The first strike began on 5 June 1998, when 3,400 UAW members stopped working at a metal stamping plant in Flint. Six days later, on 11 June, 5,800 UAW members at Flint Delphi Automotive Systems followed suit. This plant was the only source for certain components in North America. Within just two weeks, over 190,000 workers at 27 General Motors plants across North America had been sent home for the simple reason that there was no work for them to do. In addition, 117 component and supplier plants owned by subsidiaries of GM had either closed or reduced production. The impacts were also felt *globally*, with production at GM's plants in Mexico and Singapore being affected. Within a matter of days, the strike action had crippled General Motor's highly complex Just-In-Time production system across North America (Figure 9.6). The impacts on GM were significant – it lost production of some 500,000 vehicles and posted a loss of US\$2.3bn for the second and third financial quarters of 1998. By the end of the strike action, local workers had extracted a number of concessions from their employer related to preserving existing forms of work organization, investment in the metal stamping plant in return for productivity increases, the removal of the threat of legal action against the UAW, and assurances about the short- to medium-term future of both Flint plants.

This example illustrates how workers acting in a particular place may be able to exert their agency to good effect. By choosing strategically important nodes in GM's global production network, and stressing that local issues were behind the strike, the UAW was able to gain the upper hand over GM and extract real concessions during subsequent negotiations. Workers and worker groups taking action on their own is not the only *in situ* option available, however. Workers may also choose to collaborate with other local interest groups through either *cross-class alliances* or *community unionism*. In the former case, workers join forces with local employers and government to defend existing investments in a particular place, or to try and attract new ones. In the cities of the industrialized world, these kinds of alliances have come to be known as *growth machines*. In the case of community unionism, workers collaborate with a variety of local non-work-based groups to pursue particular issues (see Box 9.4 for more on community unionism).

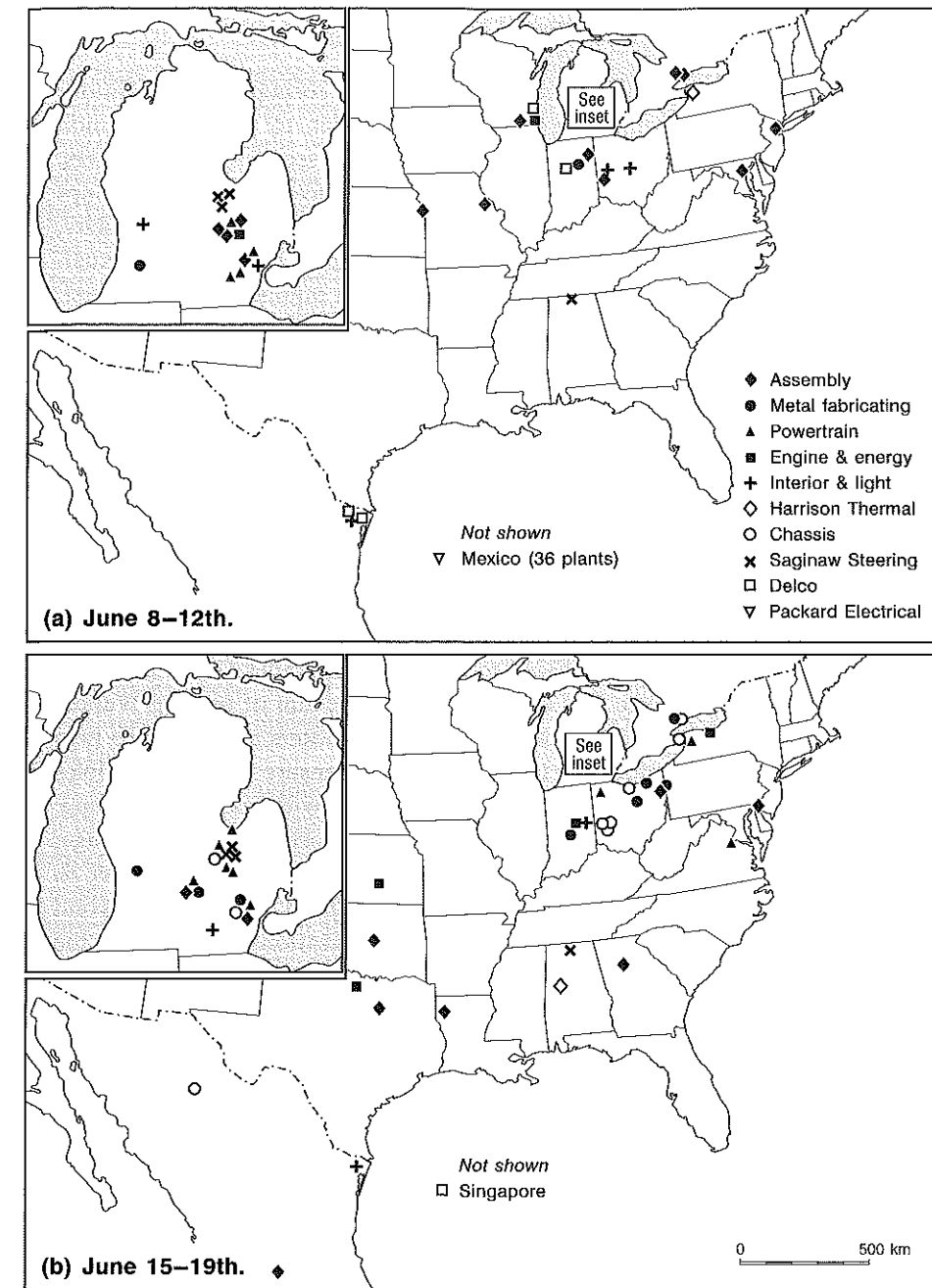


Figure 9.6 The spread of the GM UAW dispute

Source: Redrawn from Herod (2000), Figures 1 and 2. With permission of Blackwell Publishing.

Box 9.4 Community unionism

Community or reciprocal unionism refers to the formation of coalitions between unions and non-labour groups in order to achieve common goals, such as a minimum Living Wage for public sector service workers. In other words, it is about unions forging alliances with other groups whose primary identity might be based on affiliations of religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, environmentalism, neighbourhood residence or sexuality. Community union initiatives aim to achieve a number of things. First, by increasing the scale of organizing activity, they can deal with questions of economic justice beyond particular workplaces. Second, by working with community groups, unions are able to reach workers in traditionally non-union environments. Third, they can enable unions to help organize fragmented workforces split across large numbers of small workplaces (e.g. security and cleaning staff). Fourth, extensive links into the local community may help unions defend terms and conditions within their traditional workplaces. One pioneering example of community unionism is the Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Union Council (BWTUC) in Southwest London. BWTUC is a multi-union body made up by local representatives of unions affiliated to the national Trades Union Congress (TUC). In 1999, a centre was established with the aim of making Wandsworth a 'Respect at Work Zone'. The centre's workers are tasked to help organize non-union employees in Wandsworth to ensure five key principles are upheld for workers: (1) dignity – a secure job with adequate training; (2) decency – a say in the future of their job; (3) fairness – a decent wage; (4) equality; and (5) justice – a safe and healthy workplace. In order to do this, BWTUC has forged a number of links both within and beyond the trade union movement, working with organizations as varied as the West London Business Link (a support organization for local small and medium-sized businesses), the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), the local Further Education College, after-school clubs and local environmentalists. These various links have enabled BWTUC to reach a large number of people in the locality, and it is estimated that the centre brought at least 3,500 people into trade unions during the first two years it was in operation. Workers in poorly unionized sectors such as retailing, fast food and private manufacturing firms have been particularly targeted. For more, see Wills (2001) and <http://www.respectatwork.org.uk/>.

'Upscaling' worker action: organizing across localities

The final kind of geographical strategy we will consider is organizing across localities, or *upscaling* worker activity. This upscaling can take place at different spatial scales: it might be between workers in neighbouring towns; it might be between workers in distant parts of the same region or country; or, it might take the form of transnational connections between workers in different countries. Equally, it might be organized formally through local, national or international trade union structures, or it might be relatively organic and grassroots in nature, connecting across localities outside of formal worker organizations. Translocal activities of these kinds have a number of advantages: first, inter-place cooperation can prevent different groups of workers being played off against each other; second, a simple strength in numbers can be achieved by bringing more workers into a particular action; and third, a greater level of resources can be tapped by involving national and international organizations. In many countries, the formation of national trade unions (for example, on occupational or sectoral grounds) has traditionally been the favoured means of coordinating worker representation and action. As globalization dynamics have gathered pace in recent decades, however, and national labour agreements and unionization rates have come under pressure from both governments and corporations, increased emphasis has been placed on worker internationalism, that is, worker activism coordinated at the international scale to try and tackle the global reach of firms and capital.

A compelling example of a globally organized worker campaign is provided by the 20-month struggle between 1,700 members of the USWA (United Steelworkers of America) Local 5668 and the multibillion dollar metals trading empire of the international financier Marc Rich (Herod, 1995). The dispute started in 1989 when an aluminium plant near Ravenswood, West Virginia, was purchased by investors and became the Ravenswood Aluminium Corporation (RAC). Almost immediately, the RAC sacked 100 workers, increased the pace of work in the factory, and disbanded a joint worker-manager safety committee. Over the course of the next 18 months, five workers were killed and several injured at the Ravenswood plant. Employer-worker relations deteriorated still further when, in September 1990, the Ravenswood branch of the USWA (Local 5668) came to renegotiate its members' contracts with the RAC. In late October, RAC suspended the negotiations and hired 1,700 non-union replacement workers, arguing that Local 5668 was delaying the resolution of talks and was therefore technically on strike. The union workers were effectively locked out of their workplace. They decided to take up the fight through the USWA and the general US trade union, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO).

The campaign developed momentum when Local 5668 discovered who the owners and shareholders of RAC were. Most importantly, the investors were

found to be led by Marc Rich, a notorious financier living in Switzerland and wanted in the US on tax fraud charges. Armed with this information, and in addition to pursuing labour law resolutions that would help their position, the USWA and the AFL-CIO organized an openly transnational campaign to get the Ravenswood workers reinstated. First, the two unions lobbied over 300 end-users of RAC metals worldwide to stop buying Ravenswood products. Second, the unions strove to reveal the links between Rich and the events at Ravenswood. In a series of actions involving unions in Western Europe, attempts were made to disrupt economic activities associated with Rich. For example, organized by the International Union of Food and Allied Workers, some 20,000 trade unionists protested against Rich's attempted purchase of a luxury hotel in Bucharest. By the spring of 1992, anti-Rich activities had been organized in some 28 countries on five continents, with the result that in June of that year, RAC was forced to concede defeat and to reinstate the workers of Local 5668. Coordinated in this instance by two large US unions, and by focusing on the various transnational operations of the Rich business empire, thousands of disparate workers worldwide were able to secure a favourable outcome for their colleagues at Ravenswood. What this reveals is that, in some instances at least, the power of corporations can be challenged by up-scaling worker action and connecting across different places.

9.5 Beyond Capital Versus Labour: Towards Alternative Ways of Working?

So far, this chapter has examined the role of workers *within* the capitalist system. However, it is possible to think of a wide range of non-capitalist or *alternative* economies within which the nature of work might be different to the dominant capitalist system. As we saw earlier in the case of the Jamaican information-processing sector, economic geographers need to recognize the diverse range of ways of working that *together* sustain livelihoods in communities across the globe. In the context of workers, it is possible to identify two alternative kinds of employment spaces that are being carved out within contemporary (capitalist) economies (Leyshon et al., 2003):

- alternative *formal employment spaces*: the emergence of 'third sector' community-owned and run enterprises – for example health, youth or arts centres – intended to fill the gaps in welfare provision between the state and private sectors (Box 9.5 profiles a well-known example of a workers' cooperative, the Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in Spain).
- alternative *informal employment spaces*: encompassing a variety of informal non-market work activities, which may be paid work that is hidden from the state (e.g. a builder paid cash-in-hand to evade taxes), unpaid

Box 9.5 *The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC)*

The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation (MCC) was formed in the Basque area of Spain in 1955. Unhappy with the close relations between large businesses and the Spanish government in the aftermath of Spanish Civil War, Father José María Arizmendiarieta set up the first cooperative in order to establish a degree of economic and political independence for the area. Since its creation, the cooperative has greatly expanded, and now encompasses over 200 separate companies and bodies, divided into three industrial groups and a series of research and training centres (including a university). By 2003, the MCC employed just over 68,000 staff – 49 per cent in the Basque region, 39 per cent in the rest of Spain, and 12 per cent abroad – and had assets of €16.3bn and total sales of €9.6bn. Underpinning the whole endeavour are ten guiding principles:

- 1 open admission
- 2 democratic organization
- 3 the sovereignty of labour
- 4 the instrumental and subordinate nature of capital
- 5 participatory management
- 6 payment solidarity, i.e. just and equitable salaries
- 7 inter-cooperative cooperation
- 8 social transformation, i.e. reinvestment in community
- 9 universality, i.e. involvement in international organizations
- 10 importance of education and lifelong learning.

From its formation until the early 1990s, the MCC was able to use these principles to inform a model of growth that was widely lauded. Since then, however, it has gone through a period of expansion and restructuring driven by the logics of global competition that has challenged its founding principles, thereby illustrating the difficulty of instituting truly 'non-capitalist' forms of working. Traditional labour-intensive production methods have been steadily replaced by the greater use of technology. In addition, the MCC widened its growth strategy to include joint ventures – often with non-cooperatives – and offshore production and markets. By 2003, the MCC had 38 overseas plants and exports of €2.5bn. Overall, just over half of employees are now cooperative members. While the figure is 80 per cent in the Basque region, it is far lower in the rest of Spain, and negligible overseas. Another indicator of change is that the MCC has had to relax its rule that the ratio of the highest to the lowest wage should be at most 3:1. In sum, growing involvement in global markets has 'diluted' the

coverage of MCC ideals. Managers now find themselves wrestling with depressingly familiar dilemmas, such as whether to keep production in the Basque region, where pay rates are higher, and risk job losses and firm closures, or establish joint ventures in regions where wages are low (Clamp, 2000). For more, see: <http://www.mondragon.mcc.es/ing/index.asp>.

work undertaken for one's own household (e.g. childcare and cleaning), or unpaid work for another household (e.g. work exchanged within family networks).

The importance of these alternative ways of working will clearly vary both socially and spatially. While in many developed societies they exist in addition to, and towards the margins of, mainstream capitalist activity, in many developing world cities they may constitute the chief forms of daily economic exchange for large sections of the population. For example, estimates suggest that between 40 and 60 per cent of total employment within the cities of Latin America, Africa and Asia is informal in nature.

We should not assume that these other forms of economy are unproblematic alternatives that might replace the capitalist system simply if more people engaged in them. Rather, the challenge for economic geographers is twofold. First, it is necessary to explore geographical variations in the prevalence and significance of these activities, and the ways in which these ways of working connect to, and interact with, the dominant capitalist system. Second, we need to consider how such activities might offer a potentially important starting place for thinking about how capitalist labour relations might be resisted, challenged and even changed – even if change is gradual and incremental. In reality, however, these initiatives quite often reveal as much about the difficulties of disconnecting from capitalist dynamics as they do about the potential for change. The Mondragon case (Box 9.5), for example, clearly reveals the problems inherent in combining a successful cooperative venture with the imperatives of the global marketplace. Equally, some third sector schemes can be read as state-driven initiatives designed to conceal gaps in formal welfare provision. Alternative economic geographies are seemingly always open to incorporation by capitalist activity. Equally, they may simply supplement the mainstream while remaining only notionally separate from it, or may support it without really providing a challenge to its dominance. While alternative economies need to be read critically then, this in no way detracts from the fact that there *are* different ways of living and working. If economic geographers believe in progressive change to the capitalist system, they will surely have to foreground and engage with these activities in order to complement understandings of labour geographies based on formal wage labour.

9.6 Summary

This chapter has moved from discussing *passive* geographies of labour to exploring the *active* geographies of labour. Under the former heading, we have reviewed a range of mechanisms and controls used by both corporations and states to place workers under pressure in the context of a global economy where capital is *relatively* mobile with respect to labour. This does not mean that workers are powerless, however. Considering the agency of labour, we have explored a range of spatial strategies that workers may use to try and resist, and indeed change, the dynamics of global capitalism. Workers may act alone, or in coalition with other groups in society, and they may do so in place, by moving between places, and by connecting across places. Various examples have been given to demonstrate these different strategies in action. The chapter concluded by considering the potential for alternative non-capitalist ways of working, albeit within the context of a global capitalist system.

Returning to the question which frames this chapter – can workers shape economic geographies? – our answer is a qualified 'yes'. As noted in Chapter 3, capitalism is an economic system that depends on the activities of waged workers at the same time as it tries to extract concessions from them. Furthermore, it is a system that depends on complex connections both within, and between, different places. As we have seen, these two attributes offer considerable potential for labour to exert its collective agency in different ways. Importantly, however, the ability to act varies both socially and spatially. What is possible in some workplaces, sectors, and localities may not be viable in others. It is the task of the economic geographer to reveal this on-the-ground complexity and the implications that stem from it. What is clear though, is that workers, in addition to states (see Chapter 7) and firms (see Chapter 8), are extremely important agents for change in the development of the global space economy.

Further reading

- Castree et al. (2004) provide a student-friendly and explicitly geographical approach to the study of labour.
- Herod (2001) charts the shift from geographies of labour to labour geographies and offers a range of compelling case studies of the latter.
- Jonas (1996) offers a challenging but rewarding conceptualization of local labour control regimes and the ways in which capital is necessarily attached to place.
- Kelly (2002), Mullings (1999), Saxenian (1999), Herod (1995, 2000) and Wills (2001) offer further details on the various case studies covered in this chapter.
- Examples of different 'ways of working' are described and evaluated in Leyshon et al. (2003).

Sample essay questions

- In what ways are business- and state-imposed mechanisms of labour control interrelated?
- How and why do the mechanisms of labour control employed vary between different places?
- How can labour work with others in the local community to assert its agency?
- What are the main geographical strategies through which workers can assert their agency?
- What are the possibilities and limits of workers organizing themselves transnationally?

Resources for further learning

- <http://www.ilo.org>: the website of the International Labour Organization, a United Nations agency, has a wealth of information of labour and working conditions worldwide.
- <http://www.icftu.org/default.asp?Language=EN>: the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) is one of the most important international union federations (see also the World Federation of Trade Unions: <http://www.wftucentral.org/>).
- <http://labornotes.org/>: the home of Labour Notes, a regular report on labour activism worldwide.
- <http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>: the website of the Global Compact, a UN initiative to bring together companies, labour and civil society groups to promote universal principles in the areas of labour, human rights, the environment and corruption.
- <http://www.etui-rehs.org/>: the research arm of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) which offers a range of reports and information on labour issues in Europe.
- <http://www.labourstart.org/>: this is a trade union website that contains up-to-date stories about worker struggles worldwide.

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