

ITF ORGANISING MANUAL

EMPLOYER'S

ANTI-UNION

CAMPAIGN

**The fundamental conflict between labour and capital will result in some effort by the employer to keep the workers away from the union.** Predict what your employer is likely to do, whether it is positive or negative. You will want to explain the employer’s campaign before it begins.

**Stay on the offensive.** If the union gets stuck continually responding to the employer’s message, we will lose. Keep the

focus on improving working conditions.

**The employer will want to focus on dues, strikes and unions, using scare tactics and temporary fixes.**

**The union will want to focus on improving working conditions and having worker input in decision-making.**

**Don’t be defensive.** Responding directly to the employer’s false charges can give them legitimacy and importance.

## WHAT WOULD YOUR EMPLOYER SAY ABOUT UNION DUES?

Your employer might say:	Your employer won't say...
The union can raise your dues or charge you other assessments whenever it feels like it.	Only union members can decide to raise the dues. The facts about the amount of union dues and the union finances.
You can't afford to pay union dues.	You can't afford not to have a union. And you want a union that's financially stable.
The union will just spend your money on corrupt schemes and big salaries.	Union members decide how to spend our dues on services.
The union is only interested in your money.	The union exists to organise and serve workers.

## WHAT MIGHT YOUR EMPLOYER SAY ABOUT STRIKES?

Your employer might say:	Your employer won't say...
Unions love strikes.	Workers join unions to improve working conditions. Strikes are sometimes necessary.
The union can force you to strike.	Workers decide to strike.
Union strikes are violent.	What violence has occurred during past strikes and why.
Strikes are long.	Give facts on length of time of past strikes.

## WHAT MIGHT YOUR EMPLOYER SAY ABOUT UNIONS?

Your employer might say:	Your employer won't say...
The union will fine you for misbehaviour or for not attending meetings or voting for certain political candidates.	You will want to come to union meetings and participate. If there are fines, what they amount to and why they exist.
When you sign a union membership card the union will tell you what to do and how to act.	Signing a union membership card simply means you want a union.
The union won't let you take a problem directly to management.	The union will help you talk to management when you ask for help.
The union will make false promises.	The union will answer all questions honestly.
The union leadership is not good.	The union leaders will meet with you at any time to discuss any issue or concern.

## WHAT SCARE TACTICS MIGHT YOUR EMPLOYER TRY?

Your employer might say:	Your employer won't say...
We won't ever sign a collective agreement even if you get a union here.	Your employer will be legally required to negotiate. If the employer believes they won't have to agree to improvements, why argue against the union?
You will lose wages and working conditions.	Unions work to improve wages and conditions. Better to negotiate together as a united group.
Union supporters will lose their jobs.	It is against the law and wrong to punish anyone for supporting a union. We will work locally, nationally and internationally to defend the rights of workers to organise.
We won't be one big happy family anymore.	Most union members have better relationships with their employers after they are unionised.
We will have to close or move the company.	The decision to close or move a company is rarely done simply because the workers unionise. The facts about company and industry finances.

## WILL YOUR EMPLOYER TRY TEMPORARY FIXES?

Your employer might say:	Your employer won't say...
Give us another chance, we will change.	A union is the only way to make sure the employer changes.
We have procedures for hearing your complaints.	Without a union, the employer still has the last word.
We'll change a few things that are really bothering you.	If you can get changes just by talking about a union imagine what you can get once you have joined.

## EMPLOYER'S ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN

### Learning from each other

- \* Fear is a small word with a powerful meaning.*
- \* We have all lived with fear.*
- \* We always live through it.*
- \* We are intelligent people who have organised and educated ourselves about our rights.*
- \* This is not a time to be manipulated, divided and oppressed by fear.*
- \* We know what we need, we need to organise.*

**Manny Tavarez**

*Union organiser*

### Learning from each other

*Six railway workers were dismissed in Thailand for participating in industrial action in protest against a fatal accident. Immediately after the accident, the government blamed the workers. They didn't see the fact that safety devices weren't working properly. These dismissals are union busting.*

**Pinyo Ruennpetch**

*ITF affiliate, Thailand*

If you have already discussed the issues with workers, you won't need to respond defensively to each employer "fact". If you have to respond, be clear, brief and positive. Refocus the discussion on the workers' problems and what the employer can do about them.

**Strengthen the arbolitos (worker networks) and the organising committee.** Workers need to get information from someone they know and trust who is also informative and honest.

Make sure that organising committee members are always informed.

**Don't let the employer divide workers, especially by gender, age, work area or ethnicity.** Plan social events that allow for more contact. Talk to workers and share information across the divide.

**Focus on the undecided workers.** Don't alienate undecided workers by over-appealing to union supporters.

**One of the first things that the company will do is try to get workers to stay away from the**

### **union and union supporters.**

Gather any still missing names and contact details of workers. This will be harder and harder to do as the anti-union campaign develops. You will need the contacts to keep building trust through person-to-person conversations.

### **Encourage workers to keep in touch with the union, no matter what happens, as there may be a lot of misinformation and rumours.**

If workers are fired or treated unfairly for supporting the union, it will be very important to maintain contact between them and the union and give them support. If the employer improves working conditions, it will be important for workers to know that it is a result of union activity.

**You may need to prepare workers for meetings with supervisors.** List what might be said. Plan together how to respond. Take turns practicing, one playing the role of supervisor and one the worker. Supervisors may be trained to gather information from workers. Share only information that you

### **Learning from each other**

*In Mumbai, a number of port trucking contractors in Maersk's GTI terminal responded to union organising of port drivers with violence.*

*In one incident, four drivers were abducted by thugs and severely beaten for wanting to join the union. In another, company thugs beat workers with hockey sticks and steel rods on a company bus to persuade them to join a "yellow union".*

*The union organised against the attacks, with strong international support from the ITF. A collective agreement for port drivers was eventually signed with the largest contractor, firmly establishing the right to union representation.*

### **Transport & Dock Workers Union, Mumbai**

*ITF affiliate, India*

*In Australia, a home-grown union-busting company, ACIL, a think tank linked to the right wing national Howard government, tried to break the MUA [Maritime Union of Australia] during its historic ports dispute with Patricks in 1997.*

## EMPLOYER'S ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN

### Learning from each other

*As soon as management becomes aware of our organising work, they react quite fiercely, attacking our union and the union workers.*

*Right now, we have 156 workers dismissed from UPS for organising.*

*The workers are picketing in front of transport centres, and this is not an easy thing to do, because they are under huge pressure. The workers who are still working inside are also under tremendous pressure.*

*The company has not succeeded in getting even one worker to resign from the union.*

*The local management of UPS works closely with the police. They detain union leaders as well as workers quite frequently.*

*We have been very successful organising in these situations in the past because of our deep and strong relationships with the workers, combined with our international pressure.*

**Kenan Ozturk**

*ITF affiliate, Turkey*

want to go back to the company, no matter how friendly the approach. Supervisors are often pressured to pressure workers.

**You may need to prepare for an anti-union “loyalty” committee or “yellow” (company) union.**

Attacking the workers in the anti-union committee directly or individually plays into the employer's hands. It makes the workers fight against each other instead of focusing on the need to improve working conditions. You might consider sending an open letter to the employer. The letter can remind the company that economic aid from an employer to a union is illegal and/or immoral and that the real focus needs to be on improving working conditions.

**Violence may occur.** Share with workers any history of violence that the union is aware of in your industry or with your employer. Discuss fear and predict what could happen. Prepare support teams that workers can contact in case of an emergency. Include trusted community and religious leaders.

### **Learning from each other**

*Unite, the British transport union, decided to organise the low-cost airline Flybe as part of co-ordinated sectoral strategy. The company hired the Burke Group, notorious union busters, to try and break the union from the start of the campaign.*

*The union used organising teams of full-time organisers, peer-group stewards and union officers to target the workers. All the organisers were trained in core cabin crew issues of workplace environment, crew complements, scheduling arrangements, allowances and wage structures. Additionally, the company's ownership, operations and workforce demographics were mapped. Organisers visited and mapped worksites, setting up organising committees at each workplace as the campaign progressed. Meetings, national and local newsletters, petitions and sticker days were implemented. All grievances raised by the workers were dealt with by the union, including pay, scheduling, cleaning, rest breaks and premium crew issues.*

*Organisers spent time preparing workers for the management tactics they could expect, including union busting presentations from the Burke Group and anti-union messages. "We had to immerse ourselves in the operations of the company," says Sharon Graham, director of organising for Unite. "By the end, the workforce really understood what the union was about."*

*The union put pressure on Flybe to get rid of the union busters. It looked at all aspects of the company's market and work activities to target reputation risk. The union continued to demand that company money was spent on resolving crew issues, not on unethical union busters whose purpose was to deny workers a decent wage.*

*The work paid off. When the workforce was balloted, there was an 89 per cent turnout, and 93 per cent came back with a yes vote for the union. The union strategy to organise the majority of new members from young women under the age of 30 had been successful.*

### **Unite**

*ITF affiliate, Great Britain*



## EMPLOYER'S ANTI-UNION CAMPAIGN

If there is a threat of violence, keep the arbolitos (worker networks) quiet and “underground”. Work hard to stay underground and to build collective strength before confronting the employer. Select a trusted organiser (perhaps someone who does not work directly for the company) to keep each arbolito informed and educated.

**If violence occurs, quietly and systematically stick to our plan:** mapping, training more leaders and organisers and continuing to stay underground wherever possible. At the same time, prepare for public action against the violence with ITF regional and global support.

**You may be facing an anti-union consultant.** Anti-union consultants or law firms counsel or direct the employer's anti-union campaign. The US's \$4 billion [£2 billion] union busting industry is extremely profitable and growing globally.

In summary, we need to remember (1) to keep focused on the demand to improve working conditions and (2) that informed and involved workers are our best protection against the employer's anti-union campaign.

(Information from the AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) booklet entitled “We Won and So Can You” was included in this chapter.)



The accompanying PowerPoint module on “Employer's Anti-Union Campaign” contains additional information about how to identify and expose anti-union consultants. A sample anti-union leaflet is included. There is an activity that will help you prepare for the employer's anti-union campaign.