

# Opening doors in the new China



UNI and China  
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**Bargaining  
rights a  
key issue**

# Report

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# Organising and bargaining rights are key targets

**B**uilding trade union organisation and widening collective bargaining are key aims of UNI's involvement in China as multinationals make their presence felt in one of the world's biggest and fastest growing economies.

The visit to China by UNI Graphical global union in October 2006 coincided with news of a breakthrough for the official All China Federation of Trade Unions in winning recognition at a reluctant Wal-Mart, which already has 62 stores across this vast country.

In October UNI Graphical visited a major joint venture in Shanghai involving another US-based giant - RR Donnelly, the world's largest printer - and found collective bargaining very limited.

"UNI wants multinationals to be organised wherever they operate, including China - that's the reasoning behind our drive to sign global agreements with these giant corporations," said Philip Bowyer, UNI Deputy General Secretary, in Beijing.

"We also want to play our part in helping Chinese workers deal with the enormous changes going on in their country and strengthen their hand in dealing with multinationals from abroad - many of whom may well resist meaningful negotiating agendas."

More than half the multinationals are not yet organised in China in spite of laws that oblige union recognition.

UNI Graphical is already planning a follow-

up round table meeting in China later this year involving UNI-Asia Pacific and graphical affiliates with union representatives from Chinese print and packaging enterprises and from key multinationals in the sector in China.

Deepening contacts with Chinese workers and their unions was written into UNI Graphical global union's four-year action plan at their world conference in November 2006 in Brighton.

UNI Graphical will map developments in the graphical sector in China, expand contacts with unions and the official umbrella organisation the ACFTU and ensure that global agreements with multinationals active in China bring labour rights to Chinese graphical workers.

Other sectors expected to follow Graphical to China, include UNI Commerce who have likely areas of involvement in Wal-Mart, Carrefour, Metro and Tesco.

It all started with a top level UNI delegation to Beijing in December 2004 and UNI's World Congress in Chicago in 2005 endorsing a broad China policy which aims to develop relations with Chinese workers, to step up work with democratic unions in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan and to build links to labour rights watchers and other campaigning groups in and around China. A number of other global unions are already active in China.



Cover photos:  
Street scene in Shenzhen  
UNI Graphical visits RR Donnelly  
plant in Shanghai

The Chinese Communist Party has embraced a free market and joined the World Trade Organisation while maintaining a firm political grip on the country.

Poverty in China has been reduced by the astonishing growth of the last 20 years in its economy - stimulated by huge foreign investments. But millions of traditional jobs are disappearing and the wealth gap between industrialising coastal provinces and inland rural areas is widening. While UNI Graphical was in China the government announced new measures to improve training and alleviate poverty among its rural citizens.

"This is going to be a two-way process," said UNI-Asia Pacific Secretary Christopher Ng, speaking outside a Wal-Mart store in Shanghai.

"Stronger organisation among the multinationals in China can help unions around the world by strengthening global trade union alliances. Greater involvement of unions from these companies around the world can help strengthen bargaining in China."

For example unions in Taiwanese companies - major investors in mainland China - can play a direct and positive role with Chinese unions in these subsidiaries, suggested CTWU President Hsu-Chung Chang. Translations into Chinese of good collective agreements, best practices and information on UNI and affiliates and their work are on the UNI-Asia Pacific to do list. Round tables will include workshop sessions and interactive panels to explore the scope of cooperation and the building of unions and union networks.



Wal-Mart store in Shanghai

## Closer contacts with workers and unions in enterprises that involve multinationals



UNI-Asia Pacific Graphical President Steve Walsh meets print workers in Shanghai

# It's a delicate balancing act with a clear aim

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Chinese unions will be invited to join activities organised by UNI's Asia Pacific region, including women and youth. Exchanges of information and people will play an important role. The ACFTU recently took a team to the International Labour Organisation's training centre in Turin where UNI made a presentation on global agreements that attracted a lot of questions and debate. The Chinese unions later spent a week with Finnish unions. In a meeting between the Shenzhen postal union and UNI-Asia Pacific, the union's vice-chair Wu Yu called for an increase in exchanges. His members are likely to face big changes as China is offering to open up postal services in the current trade round on services (GATS) at the WTO.

Chinese unions acknowledge the challenges they face as the country embarks on a "harmonious society" policy that embraces foreign investment and the rigours of the World Trade Organisation.

Wal-Mart's initial refusal to refuse union recognition in spite of the law and the ultimately successful campaign to organise Wal-Mart workers has prompted a debate about the very nature of trade unionism there.

But the issue in Wal-Mart and others is not just about winning recognition from reluctant overseas multinationals - it is also about how effectively can Chinese workers collectively bargain, on what issues and what happens if things threaten to become unharmonious?

"In a free market if there is no strong countervailing power then the benefit of development is not shared," warns UNI Graphical President Michel Muller.

No-one is expecting quick results and it is always going to be a delicate balancing act.

But the long term objectives of engagement in China by UNI and other global unions are clear - to help Chinese workers win labour rights, collective bargaining and decent work.

The ambitious aim is to help end exploitation, create genuinely global union alliances in multinationals and end a race to the bottom that runs right through China.

In Chinese enterprises there is a blurred division between management, union and party.

There is widespread scepticism about the independence of the official trade unions.

In foreign companies, laws alone will not force union recognition and allow genuine bargaining.

Some Chinese academics are talking of creating "bottom up" unions but, currently, unions there are "top down".

"The most pressing task is bottom-up unions and collective agreements properly negotiated to make sure agreements cover all major conditions in the workplace," says Dominique Muller from the global unions' Hong Kong office.

US and European Chambers of Commerce are objecting to draft new Chinese laws to extend worker protection and the role of unions. These would reduce the precariousness of temporary contracts, oblige severance payments when contracts are not renewed and restrict mass lay-offs.

Global unions and global alliances of national unions want to help force multinationals to respect workers rights and end exploitation.

"We need to put pressure on international institutions to pressure China to abide by the International Labour Organisation's fundamental labour rights," said Tony Burk of Amicus UK during the debate on China at the UNI Graphical world conference in Brighton. "It's not acceptable that China can join the WTO and receive huge foreign investments and deprive Chinese workers of their rights."

Steve Walsh, UNI-Asia Pacific Graphical President and a member of the recent Graphical mission to China, was equally emphatic that western unions will need to deal with the official Chinese trade union structure, as they build links with Chinese workers. "If we are serious about engaging with Chinese unions then we need to engage with the umbrella organisation."

There's certainly plenty of work ahead. Labour watcher Dr Liu Kaiming identifies five key labour issues in China:

- workers rights,
- corporate social responsibility,
- labour shortages,
- the treatment of migrant workers,
- the minimum wage (which not national and is widely ignored).

"We must not let these multinational companies come here and be outside global agreements," said UNI Graphical's Michel Muller in Shanghai.



# UNI Graphical goes to China

## 'There is work for us to do in China'

In October 2006 UNI Graphical became the first of UNI's sectoral global unions to visit China for discussions with the official Chinese trade union movement and to build direct contacts with enterprise-based workers and their unions.

Already planning has begun on follow up action for 2007.

"It's been a good first step - there is work for us to do in China," said UNI Graphical President Michel Muller, of FILPAC-CGT France as the group left Shanghai.

"We have to work with the trade union organisations in China but our perspective must be contacts inside the enterprises and joint ventures."

There are an estimated three million workers in China's printing houses and reprographic shops

At the first meeting in Beijing between UNI Graphical and the Chinese light industry union that covers printing and finance among other sectors, both sides called for an increase in dialogue and exchanges of trade unionists - and to explore areas of cooperation in a country that is home to many of the world's multinationals, including the biggest printer in the world - RR Donnelley.

A report to UNI Graphical's conference in Brighton, England in November 2006 said: "the challenge for UNI Graphical and its affiliates is to find ways to reach out and encourage new, independent worker organisation in China".

The Graphical sector has seen closures and re-structurings in the USA and Europe in recent years in multinationals like Donnelley and Quebecor, and faces continuing technological changes and growing competition from other sectors.

"It's necessary to develop much more intense international activity with these multinationals and we fully support the UNI policy to get these companies to agree to labour rights in global agreements," said Michel.

The week-long mission by UNI Graphical visited enterprises in Beijing and Shanghai with joint ventures with overseas companies, including the Shanghai joint venture involving RR Donnelley.

Because the periodicals sector is seen as politically sensitive, foreign multinationals are restricted to 49% ownership.

All the plants visited had unions recognised but the extent of bargaining varied greatly.

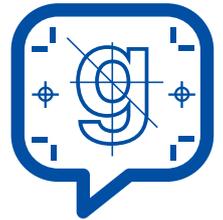
Graphical's on-going initiative in China is likely to include Donnelley, SNP Leefung Beijing and SZPC Shanghai as well as packaging giants Swedish-based TetraPak and Australian-based Amcor.

All parties involved accept that progress will take time.

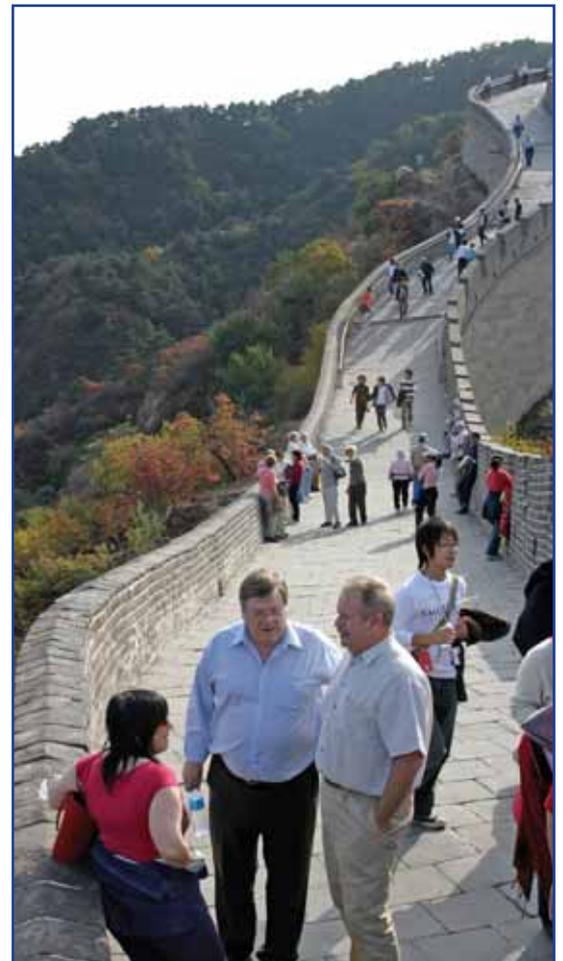
Michel led the mission with UNI Deputy General Secretary Philip Bowyer and progress reports were later given to both the UNI Executive and the UNI Graphical conference in Brighton, England.

One member of the UNI Graphical team was Kazunari Hasegawa, of Zen-insatsu Japan and Vice President of UNI-Asia Pacific Graphical. His union has been building contacts with Chinese counterparts for many years involving 20 visits so far. He told UNI Graphical's conference in Brighton the visit was "a small step but a giant leap for the global trade union movement".

The full UNI Graphical delegation to China was Michel Muller, Philip Bowyer, Christopher Ng and Kazunari Hasegawa along with Steve Walsh, President of UNI-Asia Pacific Graphical from AMWU Australia; Jan Oesterlind of GF Sweden; Adriana Rosenzvaig, head of UNI Graphical and Eiichi Ito, Director of UNI's Tokyo office.



On the Great Wall: UNI's Philip Bowyer with Adriana Rosenzvaig and UNI Graphical President Michel Muller





## Wal-Mart in China

# Wal-Mart forces direction change on unions in China

**W**al-Mart has - unwittingly - forced Chinese workers and their unions to explore new paths.

The retail giant originally refused to accept unions in its 60-plus stores in China. It defied the law and refused to accept the traditional, cosy relationship that exists between official unions in China and Chinese enterprises (and the Communist Party).

Foreign as well as Chinese companies are expected to allow the official unions in (and hand over 2% of workers' salaries).

Wal-Mart said "no".

The All China Federation of Trade Unions shouted loud, the government re-affirmed the law and influential city and provincial officials added their protests in an orchestrated ACFTU campaign.

Wal-Mart was in danger of getting the same reputation for trampling on communities in China that it has in many parts of the United States.

So, Wal-Mart moved the goal posts.

They would allow in unions but there was going to be no cosy deal and 2% of salary in the post. Wal-Mart workers would have to show they wanted unions and challenged the ACFTU to organise.

In the United States Wal-Mart exploits

labour laws, flies in teams of union busters and intimidates to keep unions out. And if all else fails they can always close down an operation (meat cutting in the USA) or close a store altogether (Jonquière in Quebec Canada) if workers still manage to jump over North American hurdles.

In China the law is unambiguously in favour of recognition (though ignored by many foreign companies). But that is in the context of close control of unions by the Communist Party for decades and the inhibited collective bargaining of today under the party's new mantra of a "harmonious society".

Boundaries between management, unions and the party remain blurred. During the meeting with UNI Graphical in Beijing one of the ACFTU team introduced himself as general manager, union chairman and president of the local party in the enterprise!

With Wal-Mart the divide was quite clear cut and the ACFTU ran its first hostile organising campaign. After enough workers in about 20 of their stores backed a union Wal-Mart conceded recognition across all its stores.

Significantly the deal excludes managers

holding office in the local unions.

Asked by the media why they can recognise unions in China (not to mention in the UK, Latin America, Japan and - until the end of 2006 and the sell off of its subsidiary - in Germany) but not in North America, Wal-Mart pointed to the "harmonious society" label that comes with Chinese unions.

But in the process Wal-Mart has managed to offend and shake-up the Chinese trade union movement.

"It has taken a lot of effort to get them organised, so it is a victory," the ACFTU's Wang Hongze told UNI Graphical.

"The establishment of unions (in Wal-Mart) is the very first step. We need to protect workers' rights and interests and let the management of Wal-Mart know that the union will not harm them - the workers and the union will help develop the organisation."

**uni**  
global union

# UNI Chicago launches China policy

It was UNI's second World Congress in Chicago in August 2005 that agreed to step up contacts with Chinese workers' organisations and to help Chinese workers develop "free, democratic and effective trade unions".

This followed an exploratory visit by a UNI and UNI-Asia Pacific delegation to Beijing in December 2004.

Congress acknowledged China as the "most dynamic and important developing country in the world". The economy is growing at around 10% a year and attracts foreign direct investment of \$60bn a year. Congress spotlighted the surging presence of western multinationals in China who, in the country's current position, can "exploit unprotected and vulnerable workers and thereby gain a competitive advantage via social dumping".

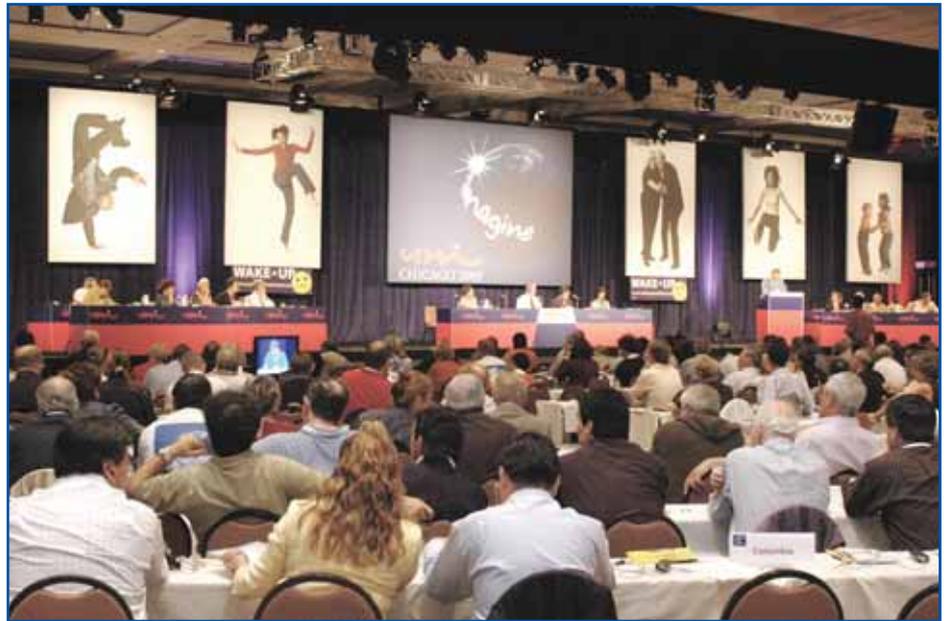
Without international networking and support, "Chinese workers and their unions will be left isolated and vulnerable at the hands of global capital".

Actions envisaged in Chicago include exchanges of officials and members between affiliates and China and offering training for Chinese trade unionists and officials.

(UNI and its founding partners have been running training courses for union activists in neighbouring Vietnam for ten years.)

Congress also called for pressure on multinationals to ensure their support in improving workers rights in China.

The aim is Chinese workers' organisations "able to defend the interests of their mem-



UNI in Chicago

## Executive endorses moves to grow unions in China and India

bers, participate in proper collective bargaining and to build the international links necessary to combat the negative actions of global corporations".

UNI has pledged to support and develop the democratic unions in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan.

"If we can demonstrate that you can have democratic, independent unions in Hong Kong that would be a great impetus for our work in China," said UNI General Secretary Philip Jennings.

UNI and affiliates are also urging national governments and international institutions like the G8, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund to insist that China implements and respects the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

At its meeting in Nyon in November 2006 the UNI World Executive endorsed a series of moves that focus on organising and building links between unions around the world and workers' organisations in China - and developing unions in Asia's other fast growing economic giant, India.

The Executive heard a report on the visit to China by UNI Graphical global union in October - the first by a UNI sector.

The World Executive agreed to dialogue with the All China Federation of Trade Unions, with NGOs and with multinationals in the country - with Wal-Mart given high priority.

Regional Secretary Christopher Ng meets Chinese unions again to work out details for organising round table discussions.

A comprehensive project of work in China will include follow-up activities across UNI sectors.

The need for coordinated global and regional activities to achieve the project's objectives was underlined.

"Chinese unions do not have experience of negotiating with multinationals, and that's where we can help," said UNI Postal President Rolf Büttner.

Work with affiliates in Taiwan continues and organising initiatives in Hong Kong and Macau so far cover DHL - with ver.di backing - Disney, security guards and cleaners. Gaming in Macau is under consideration and a UNI office has been established in Hong Kong with Michael Siu coordinating.



UNI World Executive meeting in Nyon

# Labour rights key to CSR in China

Labour rights watcher ICO organises its own conference in Shenzhen on Corporate Social Responsibility in China ....

Labour rights should be at the heart of the debate on Corporate Social Responsibility in China, a major conference in Shenzhen, southern China, in October 2006 was told.

The call came from the International Labour Organisation's Roger Plant, opening a unique two-day CSR debate organised by the Institute of Contemporary Observation, a Shenzhen-based labour rights watch organisation.

The UN Global Compact's Frederick Dubeo also urged China's new "harmonious society" to build a loser-less society and build respect for all stakeholders.

The ILO's core labour rights - freedom to join a union and bargain collectively, freedom from discrimination and freedom from child and forced labour - are "one of the central aspects of CSR at the enterprise level," Mr Plant told the 200 participants. He spotlighted the plight of many migrant workers in China (from other Chinese provinces), denied full rights in their new cities and without access to all benefits, including free education.

In China in the last 20 years 150 million workers have moved from rural areas to the city to build the Chinese economic miracle - "there is every risk that migrants who do not have equal rights are at risk of exploitation".

He also highlighted forced labour as "a problem just about everywhere in the world" and linked the issue to trafficking labour in Asia with workers being tricked over the work they go to and having to pay inflated agency charges.

"This form of modern wage bondage is a new form of slavery," said Mr Plant.

China has grown rapidly - and consistently - over the last 25 years with a totally new city like Shenzhen helping to power the phenomenal development of the Pearl River Delta.

But ICO Director Dr Liu Kaiming gave the conference some of the statistics China is less proud of - 86 million lost jobs in restructuring public enterprises, 625 million Chinese people without a pension, 654 million without health care and 650 million without unemployment insurance. There are 40 million migrant workers - many of them with low educational



Women's workshop panel in Shenzhen: Dr Zhang Hong, Xie Lihua and Guo Jianmei

## 'The Chinese government will need a policy to implement and monitor CSR if it is to be successful'

qualifications - in Guangdong province alone - and 12 million of Shenzhen's 13 million population are migrant workers, many without full rights in their new home. Labour unrest is growing with 500,000 workers involved in industrial action in 2003. Labour and skills shortages are emerging in the new China.

There are initiatives underway - from guidelines on CSR from the Shanghai Stock Exchange to a scheme by Nike to improve basic education for workers in 30 of their supplier factories in China, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

The ICO itself has set up a Migrant Workers Community College to improve computer and language skills and tackle health issues and they have programmes in 15 factories.

A panel looking at the gender implications of CSR called for the implementation of a recent law aimed at stamping out sexual harassment.

Women are playing less of a role in the rural villages while in the new cities they suffer from excessive overtime, low pay and sexual harassment at work.

"We want equal rights for rural and urban women," said Xie Lihua, from a cultural development centre for rural women.

Lawyer Guo Jianmei, who takes up cases of sexual harassment among women workers, criticised the official All China Federation of Trade Unions for often representing enterprises against claims of sexual harassment. She helped draft new laws but these are "sleeping beauties" she told the workshop session because "there is no channel for finding aid or assistance".

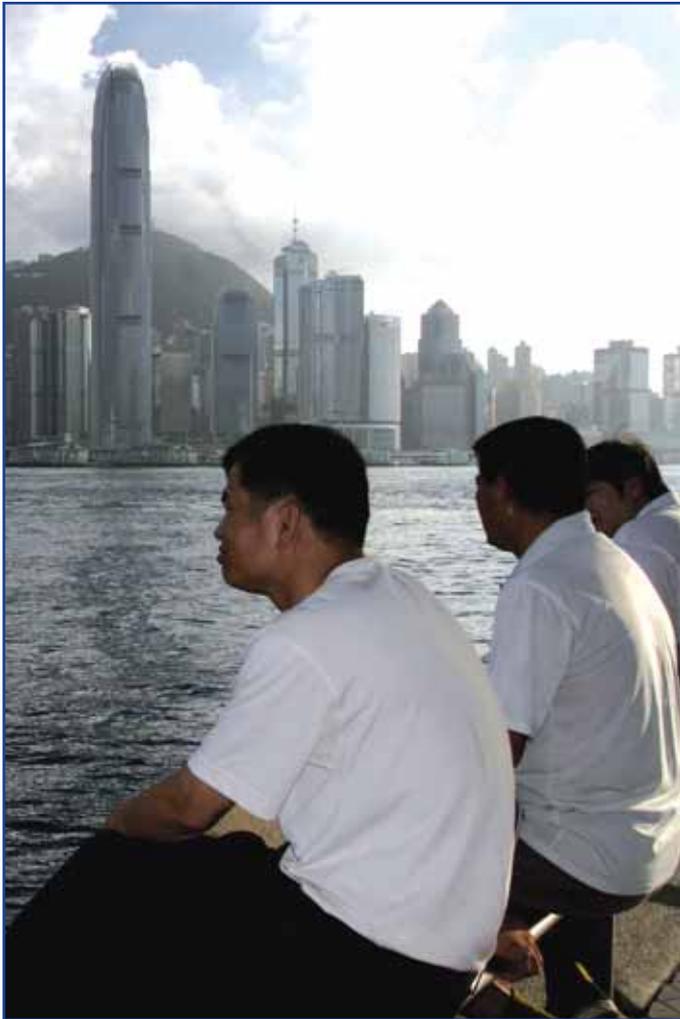
"The Chinese government will need a policy to implement and monitor CSR if it is to be successful."

Core labour rights in China "are a very serious issue," said Professor Chang Kai of Beijing University and an official expert member of the Chinese National People's Congress Economics and Finance Committee.

In a hard-hitting speech he criticised the multinationals who have turned to CSR to improve their image rather than tackle social issues.

He warned that many multinationals are not doing enough to regulate their supply chains.

He questioned the long hours commonly worked in Chinese factories, often made up of so-called voluntary overtime. "The only way they can reach the minimum wage is to work overtime."



Hong Kong is a key target for UNI organising projects

## Success in Taiwan campaign

In Taiwan ten years of targeted organising among women workers has led to a sharp increase in the number of women running for office in communications union CTWU.

Innovation has been the theme of the campaign - forsaking the smoky bar image of union meetings for a warm hotel lounge and with TV personalities to lighten proceedings there's been a lot of talking - and a lot of singing.

Breaking down traditional expectations of a woman's focus on the family and providing a channel for women workers to express their opinions have also been key aims of the union's work.

Labour rights, self esteem and encouraging women to become activists have been the three themes. "It's very obvious now that women are becoming more active - more and more women want to join the union's elections," said the CTWU's managing director Kao Mei Hsiang. "We are very confident that women will take up more posts in the union leadership - and if we get their support they will rise through the hierarchy and be more loyal to the union (be less likely to go over to management) than the men."

In call centres - where new work pressures are considerable - "women know they need to stand up for their own rights".



Kao Mei Hsiang



Cheung Lai-ha

# Campaigning for women in Hong Kong

Unions in Hong Kong are battling to improve the position of women in the former British colony that is now a Special Administrative Region of China.

Too few women make it to the top. In spite of outnumbering men at university, they see 70% of supervisory and administration jobs being filled by men.

Social benefits are weak or miss out key groups of women - including those in low paid, casual work and those at home.

"Women are victimised," says Cheung Lai-ha of the clerical workers union and a leading woman activist in the independent Hong Kong trade union centre CTU.

"We want a change in the present retirement system and we want the government to adopt family friendly policies for women who want children."

The Hong Kong authorities want more babies - the current birth rate is one of the lowest in the world - but affordable childcare is scarce and women fear being sacked if they become pregnant, says Lai-ha. And, like women in many parts of the world, working women in Hong Kong are under strong cultural pressures to continue looking after the home.

"The government is encouraging women to have babies and ask bosses to let workers with families have time to look after children. The government doesn't think that women will have to do two jobs." While there is maternity pay in Hong Kong there is no paternity leave - though some male members do support the idea, says Lai-ha.

The CTU also wants time off for workers to visit hospital or school. Many women lost their jobs as a result of the migration of manufacturing from Hong Kong to the Chinese mainland, often ending up as cleaners or domestic helpers and losing social protections.

"We want casual workers to have labour law protection so that more women can have a fair deal."

Lai-ha's union organises in the finance sector where very few top managers are women and where many staff are afraid of victimisation if they are seen to be union members - even though banks like HSBC have said publicly that they are not opposed to union activity. When there were job losses and transfers at HSBC the union leafleted offices and received many phone calls. "They call us and talk to us a lot but they are afraid to come (to meetings)."

# Going for growth in Hong Kong

## UNIdoc office to help organising projects in Hong Kong and Macau

UNI global union is going for growth in Hong Kong - stepping up organising efforts to support unions in this Special Administrative Region of China that retains its own political system until 2047.

Promoting democratic unions in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan is a key ingredient in UNI's strategy for greater involvement in China. UNI's Asia Pacific region has set up a development and organising centre - a UNIdoc - to support the campaigns, with Michael Siu coordinating.

"We can create a piece of trade union history," said UNI Postal and Logistics' and ver.di's Rolf Büttner on the launch of a project in July 2006 to organise 3,000 DHL workers in Hong Kong.

The two-year DHL project is being assisted by German affiliate ver.di and the FES foundation and involves the Hong Kong Postal Employees union. It's part of a global strategy to unionise the key hubs of one of the world's leading logistic and integrator multinationals.

Rolf Büttner sits on the Supervisory Board of Deutsche Post World Net, which owns DHL - a fast growing integrator that recently bought Exel of the UK. DHL operates in more than 200 countries with 238 gateways and has 170,000 workers worldwide.

The global campaign brings together UNI Postal and the International Transport Workers Federation.

Rolf led a team - accompanied by UNI Tokyo's Eiichi Ito - to meet DHL's management at Chek Lap Kok airport and later visited mainland China.

In January 2007 postal and logistics unions from Hong Kong, the USA and Germany met in Leipzig to discuss the campaign in DHL's three super hubs. Ver.di has built 95% membership in DHL's Leipzig hub and US affiliate the Teamsters is organising at the Wilmington, Ohio hub with pilot unions active in US airline contractors.

In October 2006 intensive training of a youthful team of organisers - assisted by the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and the SEIU of the United States - marked the launch of more projects.

These are aimed at Disney theme park workers as well as security guards, cleaners and commerce workers - and other groups are under consideration. Many of these workers suffer from low pay and long hours.



Hong Kong trade unionists at the DHL airport conference in Leipzig

A weekend camp brought together organisers and HKCTU affiliates together with Michael Crosby who led the training sessions.

Workshops explored new ways to reach out to potential new members well away from the workplace and the hostility of many managements.

"New and innovative approaches to recruitment and organising are being developed. If we don't organise we don't have a future," said Michael Crosby.

There are well-established multinationals in both Hong Kong and Macau SARs - including Brinks, Chubb, DHL, Disney, Group 4 Securicor, Sands, Vodafone and finance giants like HSBC.

So far there are few collective agreements and the movement has pro-Beijing and Taiwan factions as well as independent unions in the HKCTU.

"Building union strength and giving Hong Kong workers greater influence over their working lives are our targets," said UNI Deputy General Secretary Philip Bowyer. "What's happening in Hong Kong can provide many pointers for the future development of unions in mainland China."



**'Hong Kong pointers for union development in China'**

Intensive training for team of young organisers

# Migrant workers a major issue for China

Xia is a migrant worker on China's Pearl River Delta. An accident with a circular saw in his factory meant 40 days in hospital and left him with a permanent reminder - a missing finger. Now he is a volunteer helping in a project that aims to reach out to other migrant workers to advise them on their rights, to network and to visit other injured workers in hospital as they recover. Xia's claim for compensation against his employer is still outstanding. "The law is not always on our side and we don't know how to use the law to get our rights," he told us. "I came here to understand more and about how to handle my case."

Migrant workers - those who left their home provinces in China to join the industrial boom in places like the Pearl River Delta - are a key part of China's workforce and have played a big role in the dramatic transformation of the Chinese economy. But, far from family support, in strange new cities and without many social rights they can end up in the poorest paid jobs - and become the isolated victims of poor health and safety at work. Health and safety leaves a lot to be desired in many of the factories of the area, leaving a toll of injured workers.

Zeng Fei Yang is one of the three founders of the Migrant Workers' Documentation Centre in the city of Panyu, Guangdong province that was set up in August 1998 to help change things.

"There is a lack in addressing the problems of migrant workers," he told a visiting group from UNI-Asia Pacific in July 2006.

The project is creating a network of injured workers who themselves become project helpers and broadcast the centre by word of mouth at work.

The centre started with a simple brief of offering legal advice to injured migrant workers but since then they have broadened their scope to legal education and awareness of workers rights, reaching out to the injured while they are still in hospital - and networking.

For five years the project survived on its own resources but now it does get some help from project funding.

A second centre has been launched with a very local footprint in Panyu while the original centre reaches out to help injured migrant workers across a whole swathe of the industrialising Pearl River Delta, north of Hong Kong and Macau.



Zeng Fei Yang at the Migrant Workers' Documentation Centre in Panyu

## 'There is a lack in addressing the problems of migrant workers'

**On January 25, 2007 the International Herald Tribune reported that Chinese cities are scrambling to comply with a mandate to educate the children of migrant workers.**

**Critics charge that, in the worst cases, private schools are being closed down without provision for putting the students in public schools. The story was prompted by moves in Shanghai and elsewhere to close private schools for migrants.**

The organisation has three clear missions:

- to strengthen the awareness of labour rights,
- to promote unity among workers and create a concept of "neutral advice",
- to promote the issues of women migrant workers.

Workers committees are often seen as a key way for Chinese workers to influence their own workplace to tackle issues like health and safety and working conditions.

But Mr Zeng warned that - on their own - such committees are vulnerable. "If workers do form works committees it would be easy to pressure them or squash them."

During the visit UNI-Asia Pacific's Christopher Ng outlined the cooperation of unions in Malaysia and Indonesia to provide advice to Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, a scheme now being extended to

migrant workers from other countries.

"We want strong organisations to represent the interests of workers here in China - and that must also include the interests of migrant workers," said Christopher.

"Migrant work in China is a human rights issue - they have no political, social or education rights, they only have economic rights," says Dr Liu Kaiming of the Institute of Contemporary Observation in Shenzhen. Workers from other parts of China - who have been vital in the economic development of China - do not have full political rights in their new home cities, do not have access to all the social benefits and are more likely to be in insecure jobs. They can also be affected by the late payment of wages - which Dr Liu estimates now totals 100bn rmb.



On camera

Rights watcher



"Twenty years ago I could not have existed in China - I go anywhere and criticise," says ICO Director and Shenzhen-based rights watcher Dr Liu Kaiming. His office is in a block of apartments for migrant workers. He remains positive. "I think that in China we can do many things."

## Old and new in Shanghai

Commerce - traditional and modern - meets in Shanghai. Carrefour have 92 stores in China with more planned. Wal-Mart have 62 stores in China and are thought to be interested in buying a Taiwan based chain of in-town stores



## Graphical contacts in Beijing



ACFTU line up in Beijing: UNI Graphical met representatives from the Light Industry section of the All China Federation of Trade Unions



## Macau - casino city



The gaming industry is a likely target for UNI organising in Macau

There were clashes with police and a handful of arrests, but the demonstrators were later released without charge after a solidarity protest.

The demonstration forced pro-Beijing unions to be more vocal - and has made relations between independent unions and the government frosty.

"The government says it will talk to the union but actually they are trying to suppress the unions," said outgoing General Secretary of the General Workers Union Jeremy Lei.

During a visit by UNI-Asia Pacific in July 2006, trade unionists were busy on the streets gathering signatures for a petition to the Macau Chief Executive calling for pensions to be paid at 60 instead of 65 - and the public were queuing up to sign.

"It's vital that we give more support to independent unions in Macau and involve them in a wide range of our activities," said Regional Secretary Christopher Ng after the meeting. "It's important in the campaign to build democracy at all levels in China."

Training programmes - including English language training - are being prepared, a number of organising projects are under consideration and direct assistance will be extended to Macau by the UNI development and organising centre (UNIdoc) recently established in nearby Hong Kong.

# Building unions in Macau

The heart of Macau's new and fast growing economy is gambling as old industries have moved to the mainland. Macau's \$6bn gaming industry is now bigger than Las Vegas's and investment projects worth \$10bn are underway. It's the only place in China where gambling is legally permitted and the influx of gamblers (mainly from mainland China) currently employs 42,000 casino workers. That figure is due to grow to 70,000 - making up 50% of the economy. Already anti-union US operator Sands has moved in and when cleaning staff formed a union they fired the (Australian) contractor

and the cleaners and assumed direct management.

So, for UNI global union and UNI-Asia Pacific, organising in a gaming industry with powerful US interests is an obvious target. UNI Gaming is to hold its first ever meeting in Macau in June 2007 with casino workers from around the world.

Independent unions in Macau have been having an increasing impact. A record 7,000 trade unionists in Macau joined the 2006 May Day rally calling for improved rights for migrant and other workers.

With Macau trade unionists, Christopher Ng and Noel Howell from UNI in Nyon met Macau's independent and pro-democracy legislator Antonio Ng Kuok Cheong. Outnumbered in a legislature dominated by pro-Beijing and pro-business representatives Legislator Cheong can be blocked - by a vote of the other legislators - from even asking embarrassing questions (like about the sale of cheap public land to developers in Macau's current building frenzy). Questions - and answers - are clearly needed when one parcel of land ripe for high-rise development was sold to Macau developers for HK\$900m only to be re-sold a month later to Hong Kong developers for HK\$8.5 billion!



Left: Signing a union petition in Macau to bring down pensionable age

Right: UNI-Asia Pacific's Christopher Ng meets pro-democracy Macau legislator Antonio Ng Kuok Cheong

