

# State of US Unions & Transforming US-Latin American Labor Solidarity

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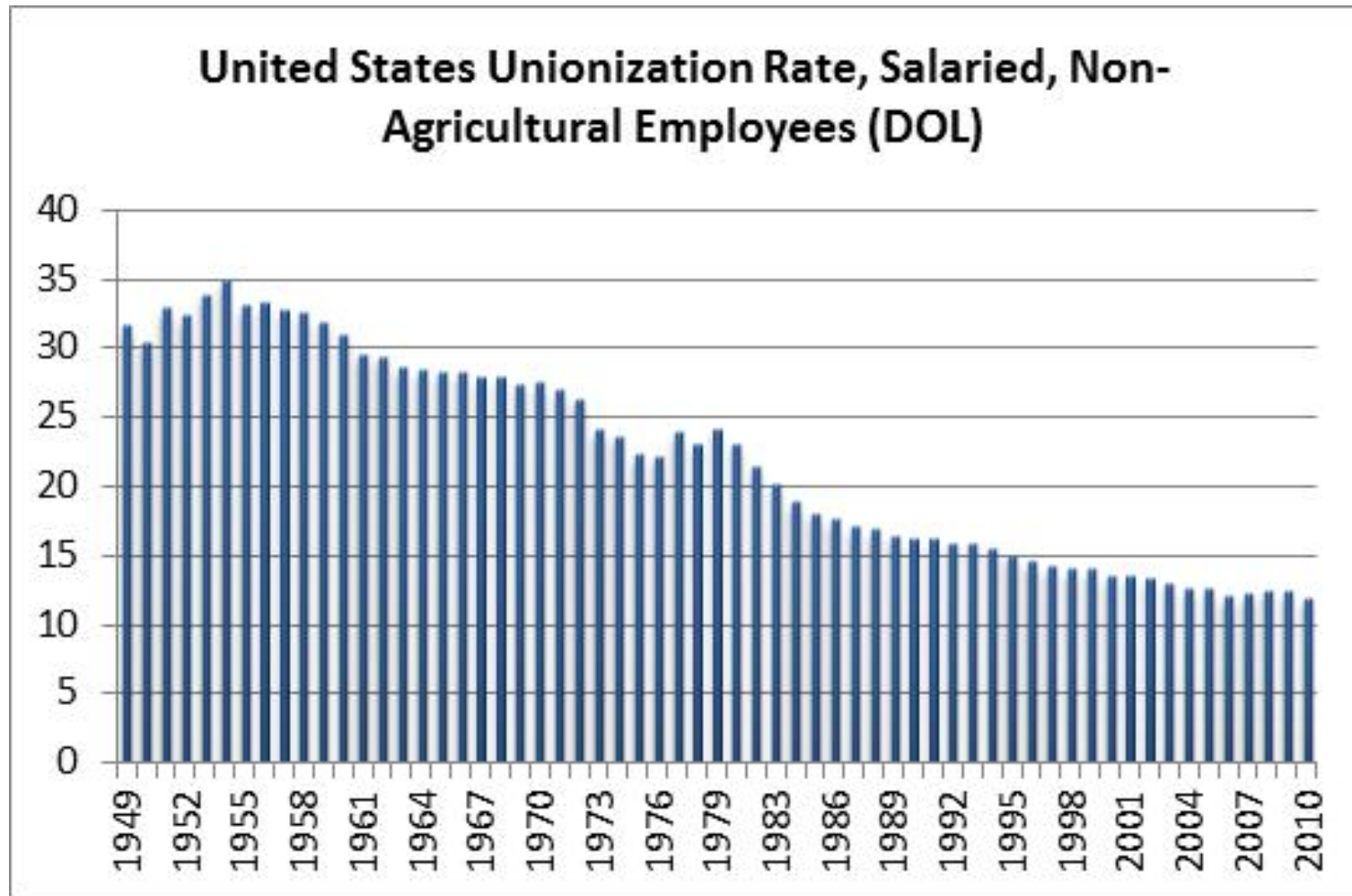
GLU, Alumni Applied Research School  
Instituto Cajamar, 1 October 2012



# State of U.S. Unions

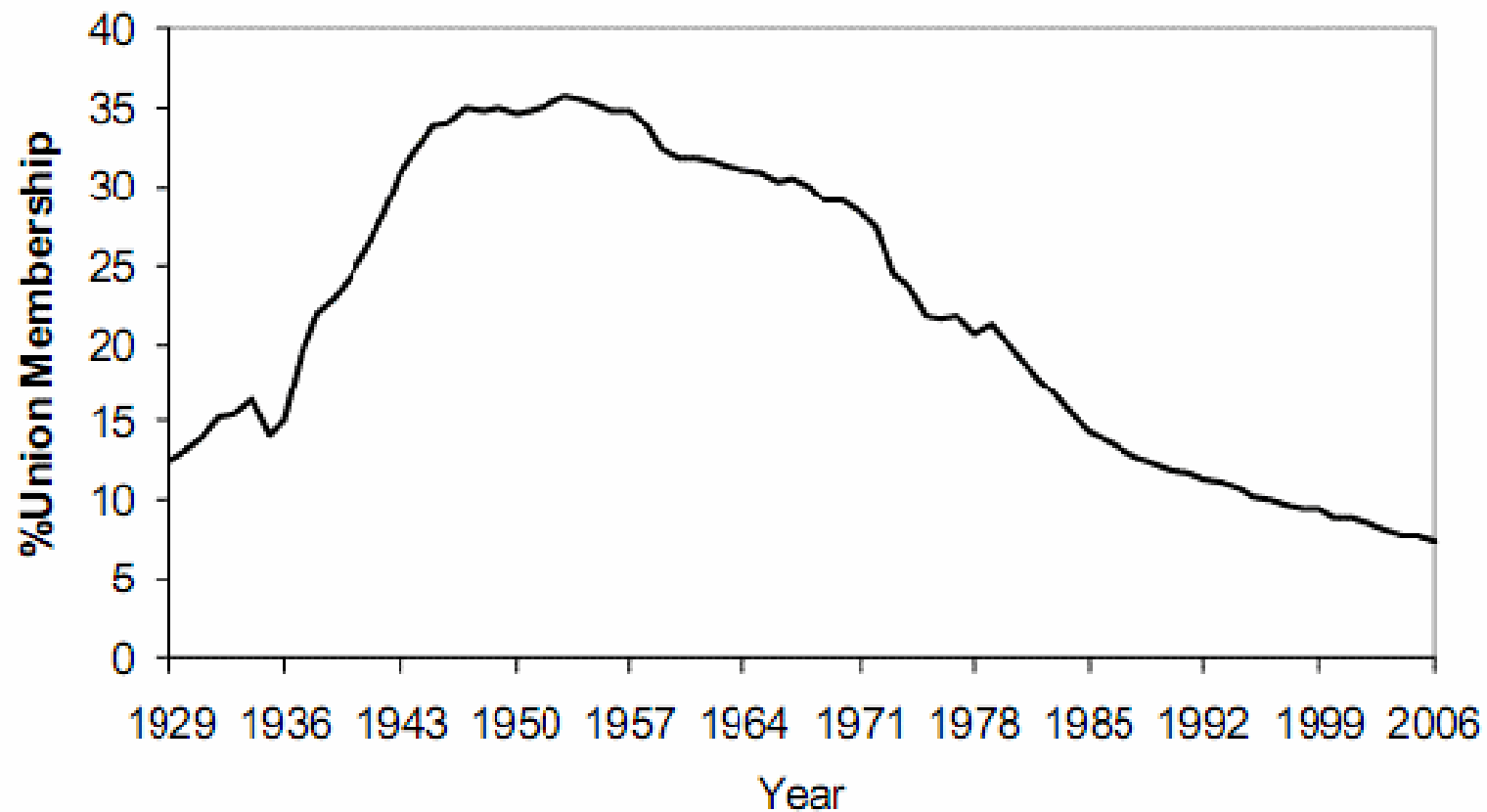


Overall unionization rate today: 11.9%



# Private sector rate today: 6.9%

Figure 1: U.S. Private Sector Union Density, 1929-2006



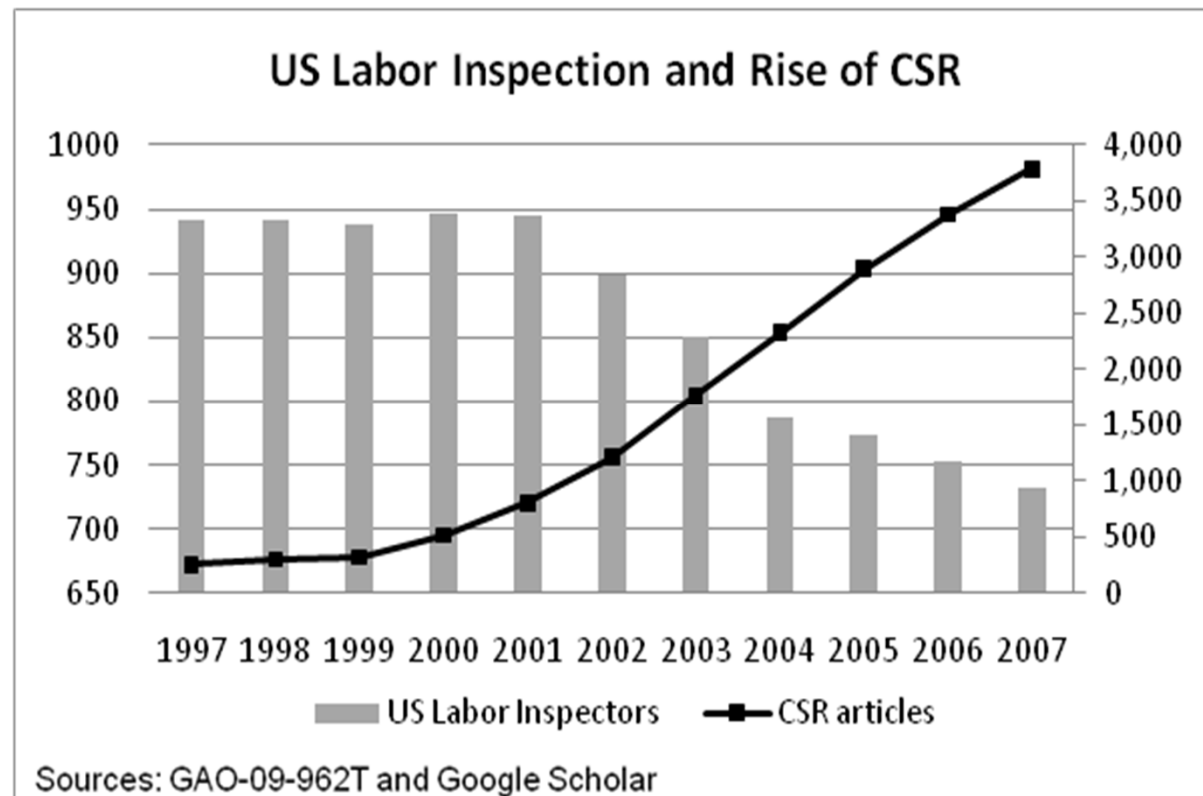


# Causes for Crisis

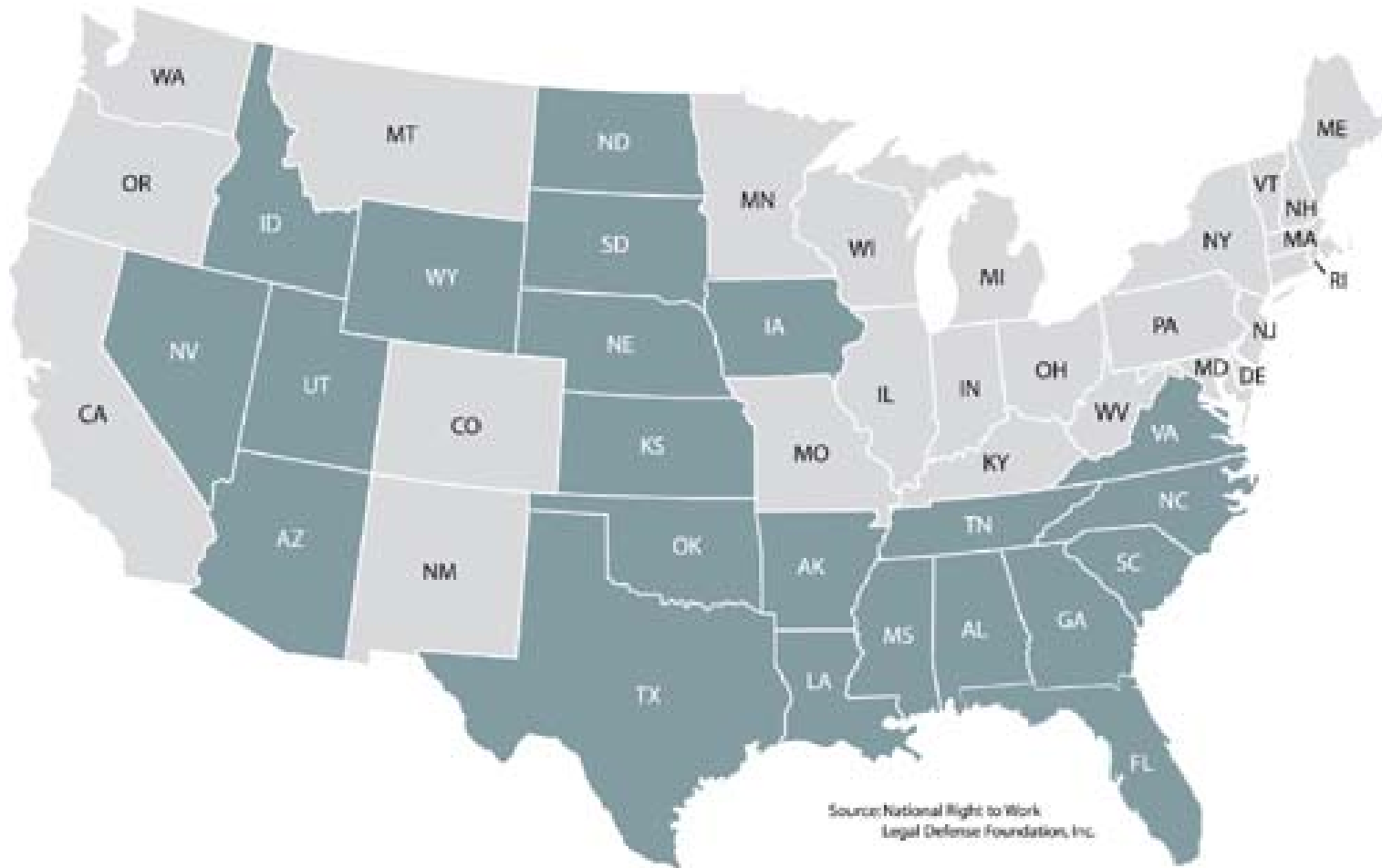
- Laws (legal context)
- Structural factors/globalization.
- Managerial strategies (aggressive anti-unionism).
- Trade union strategies. Business unionism; Servicing vs. organizing debate. “Male, pale, and stale” critique.

# The Legal Impact:

- Laws for union formation.
- Penalties for violations/Inspection.

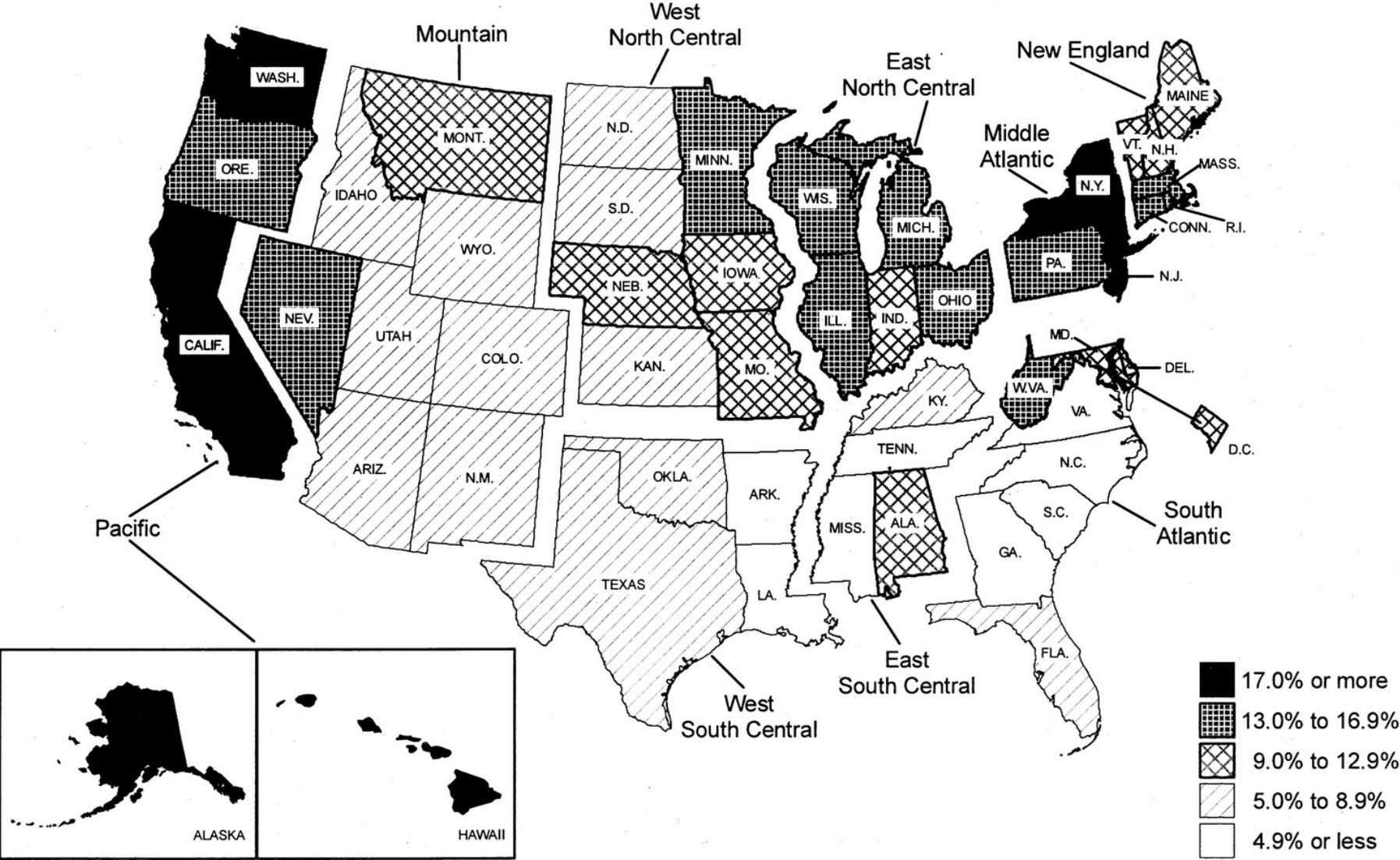


“Right to Work” States (dark blue)  
Cannot require union representation fees



# Chart 1. Union membership rates by state, 2010 annual averages

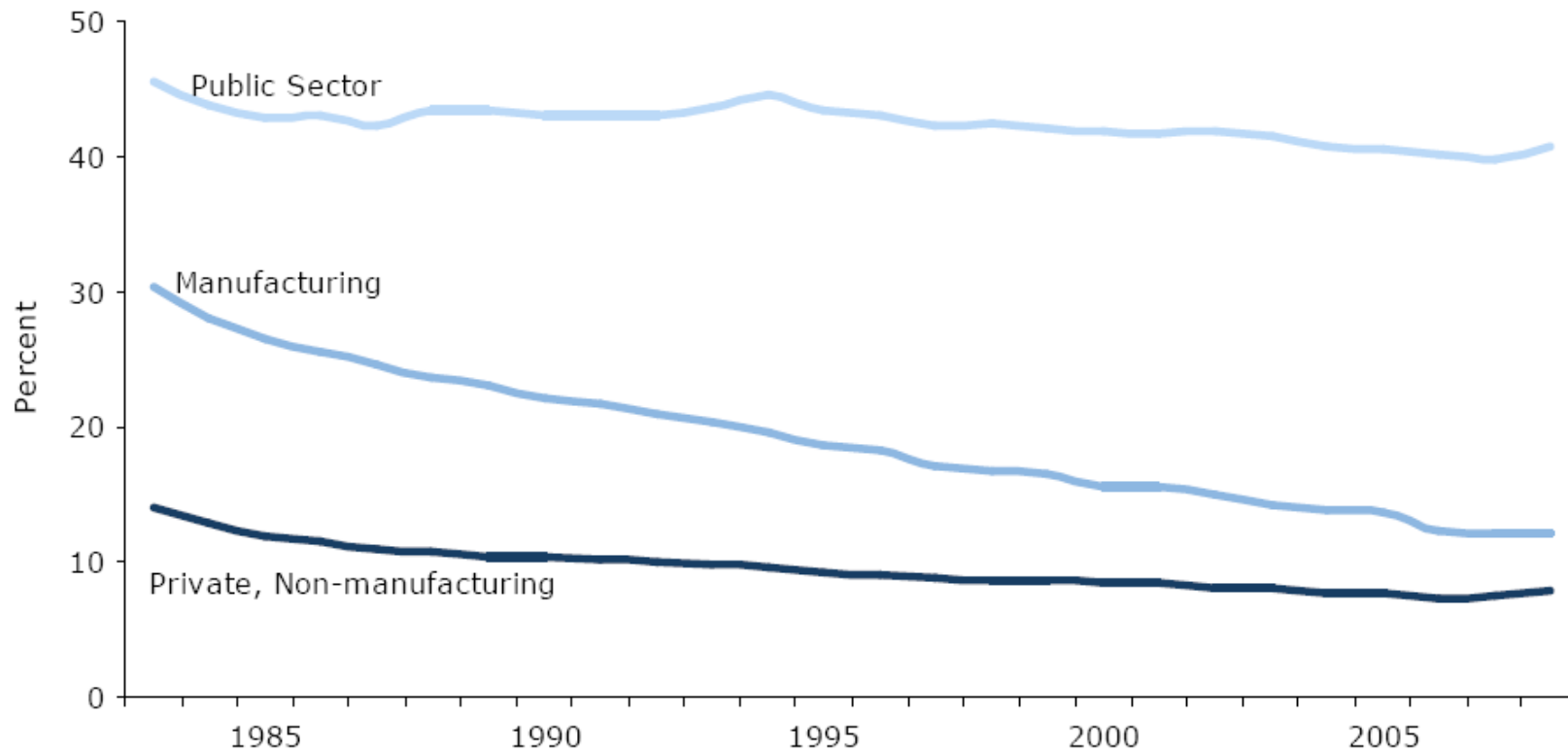
(U.S. rate = 11.9 percent)





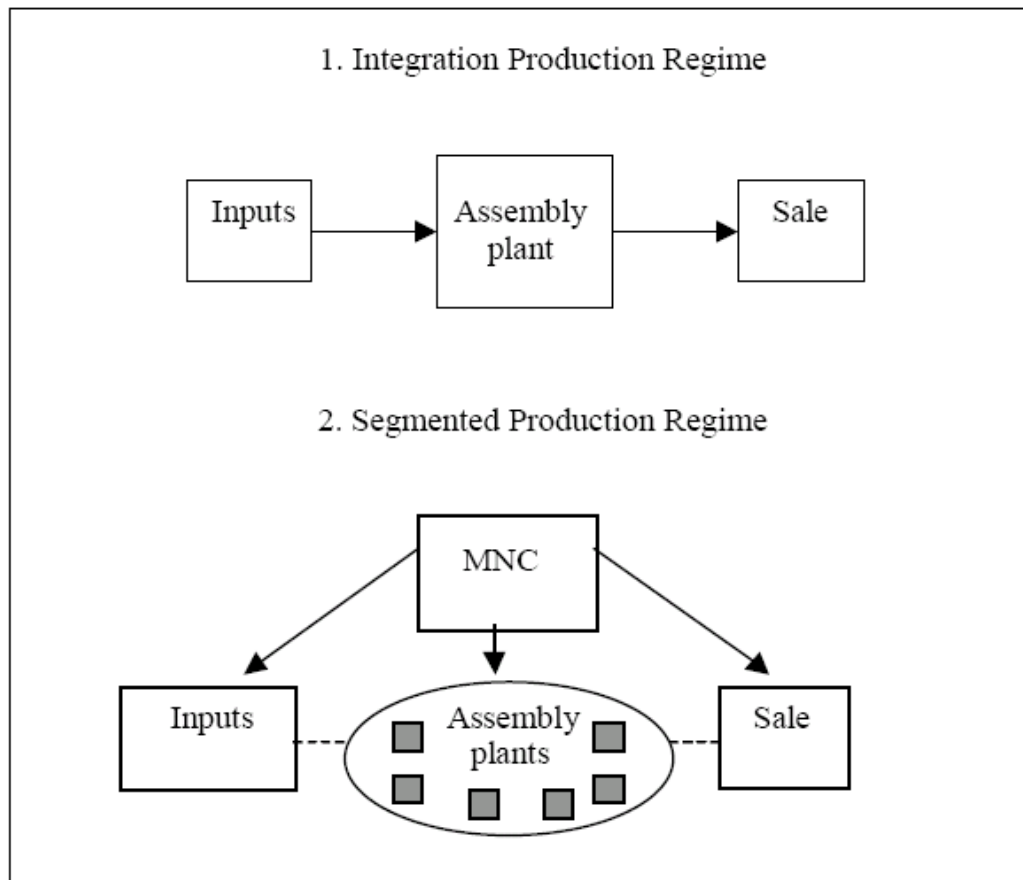
# The Labor Market and Restructuring Impact

FIGURE 15: Unionization Rate by Sector, 1983-2008



Source: Schmitt and Warner, 2009

# Impact of Restructuring on Labor



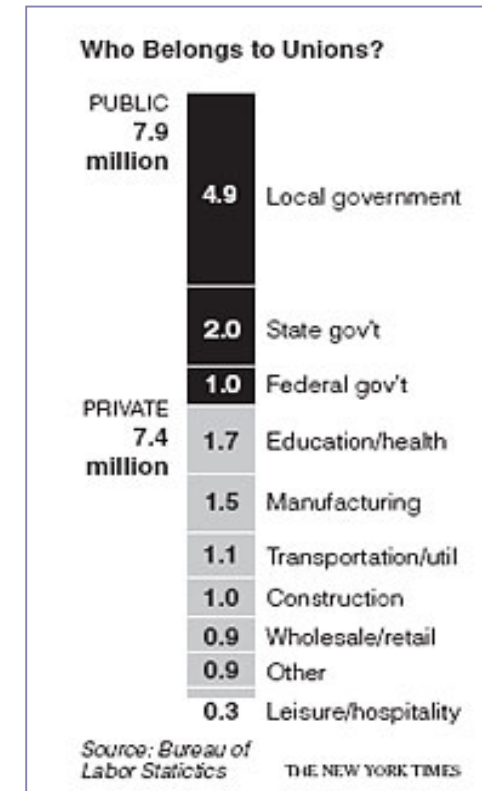
✓ Collective action problem.

✓ Labor costs/Total costs.

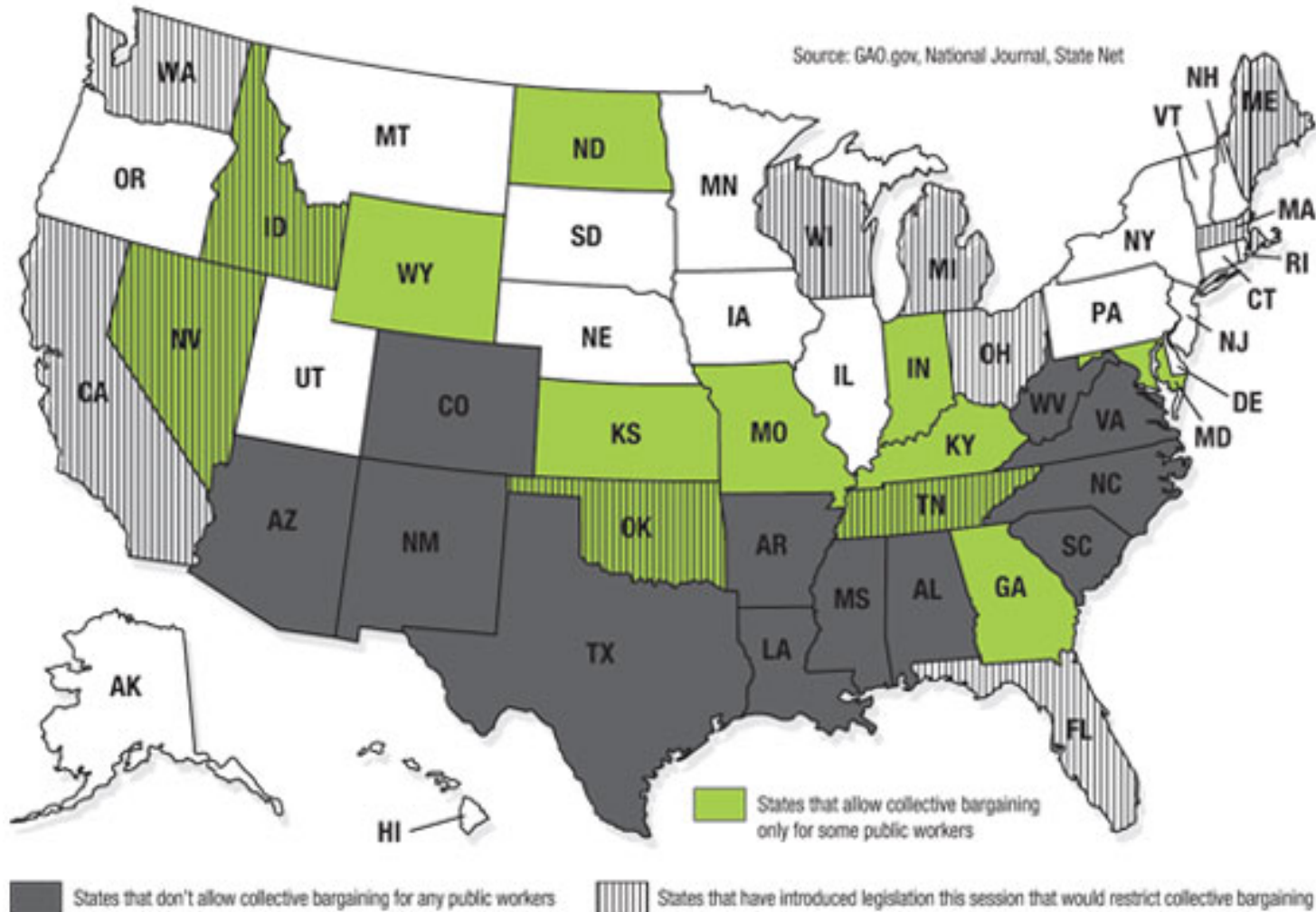
✓ Product demand elasticity.

# U.S. Unions Today

- 45% of members are women.
- 37.5% have college degrees.
- 13% are Black.
- 12.2% are Latino.
- 12.6% are immigrants.
- 51.6% are in the public sector!



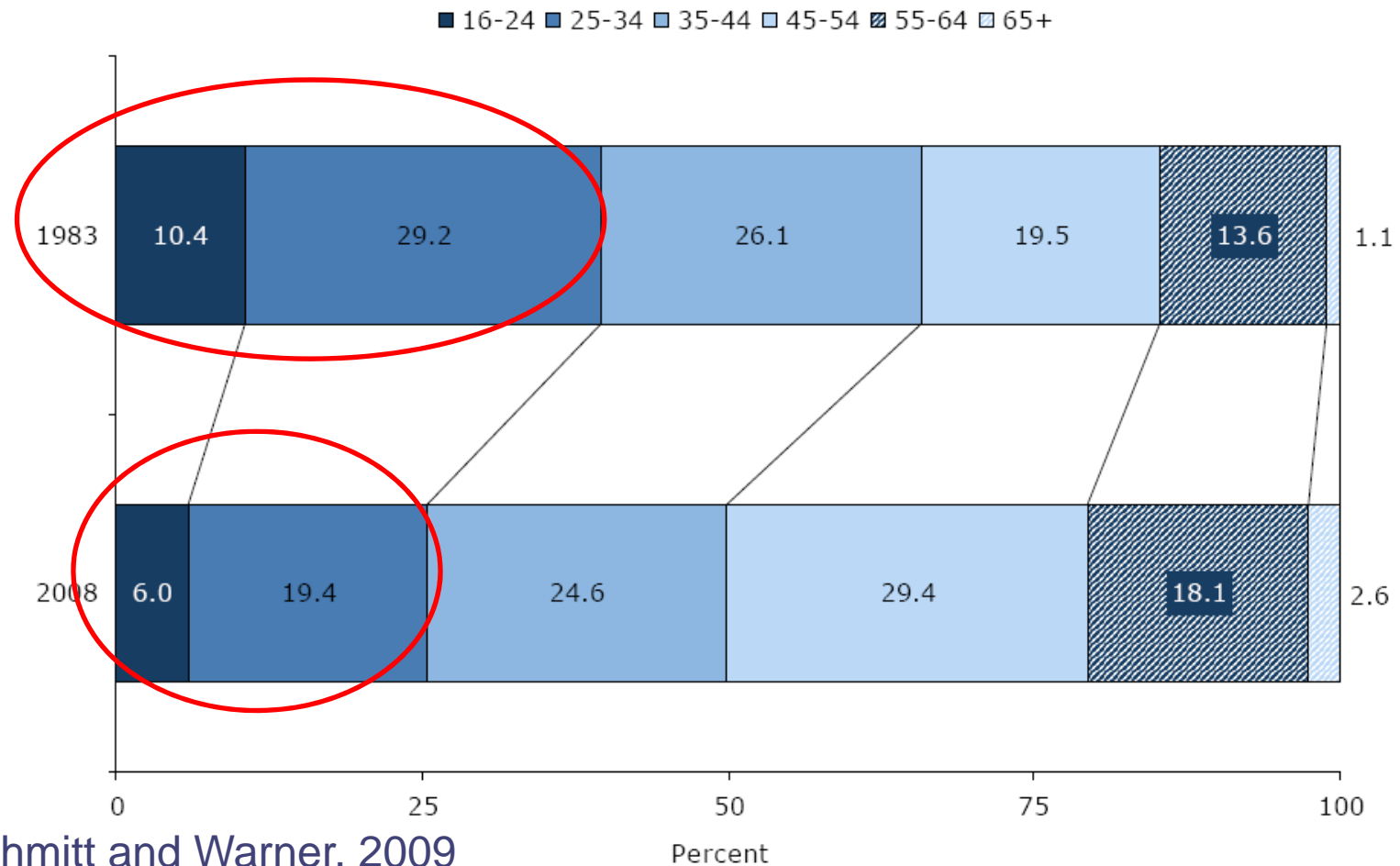
# Attack on Labor Rts. in the Public Sector



# Aging Union Movement

40% under 35 in 1983  
25% under 35 in 2008

FIGURE 8: Union Members, Share by Age Group, 1983 and 2008



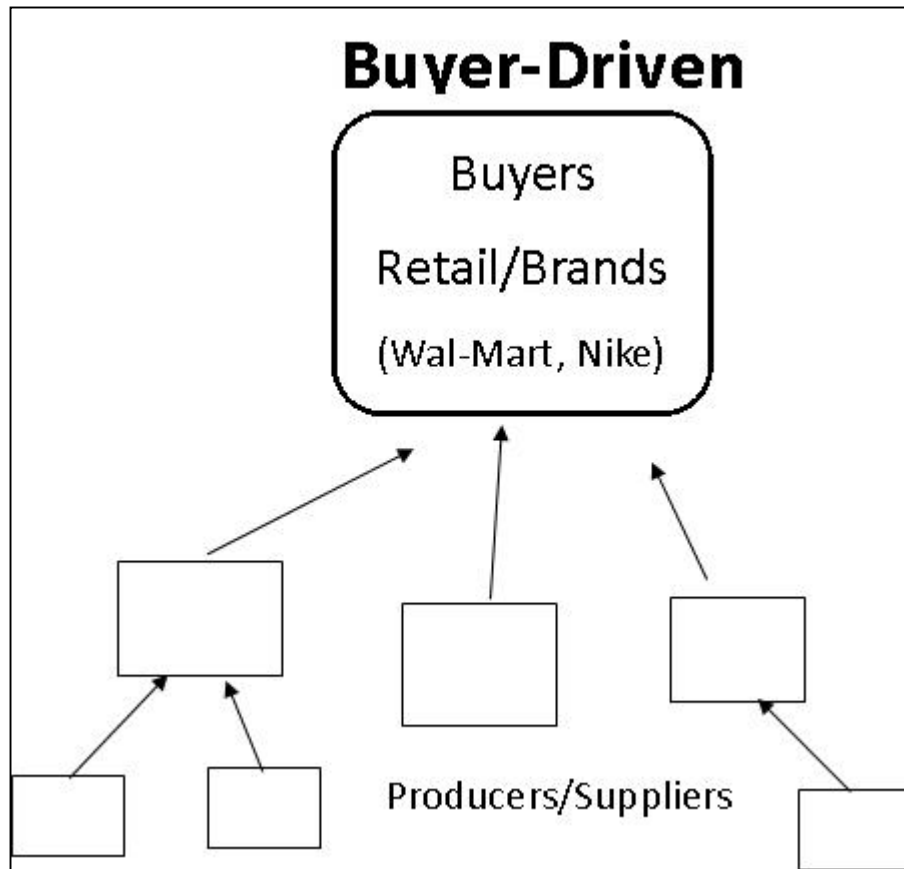
Source: Schmitt and Warner, 2009



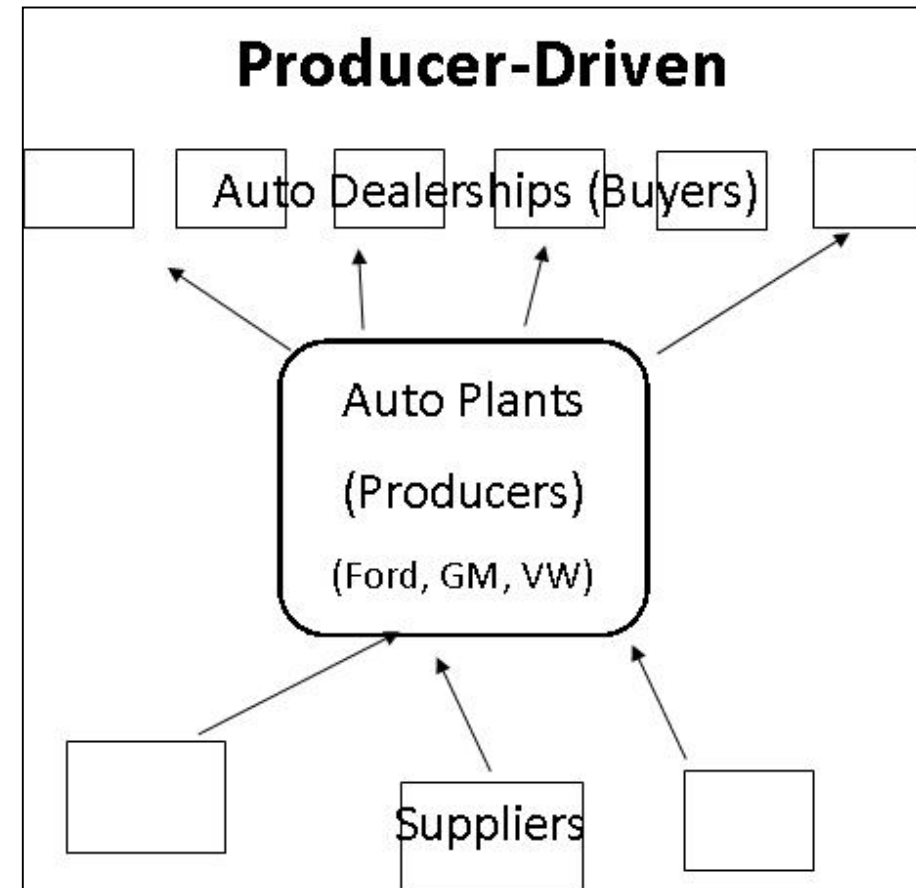
# Solidarity Transformed

- End of Cold War; Protectionism doesn't work. New leadership in AFL-CIO.
- More focused on core labor rights (collective bargaining, unionization, etc.)
- Yet, new challenges: Global Production Networks (GPN).
- Requires new forms of solidarity. Which?

## 2 GPNs; 2 Forms of Solidarity



**Transnational Activist  
Campaigns**



**Transnational Labor  
Networks**

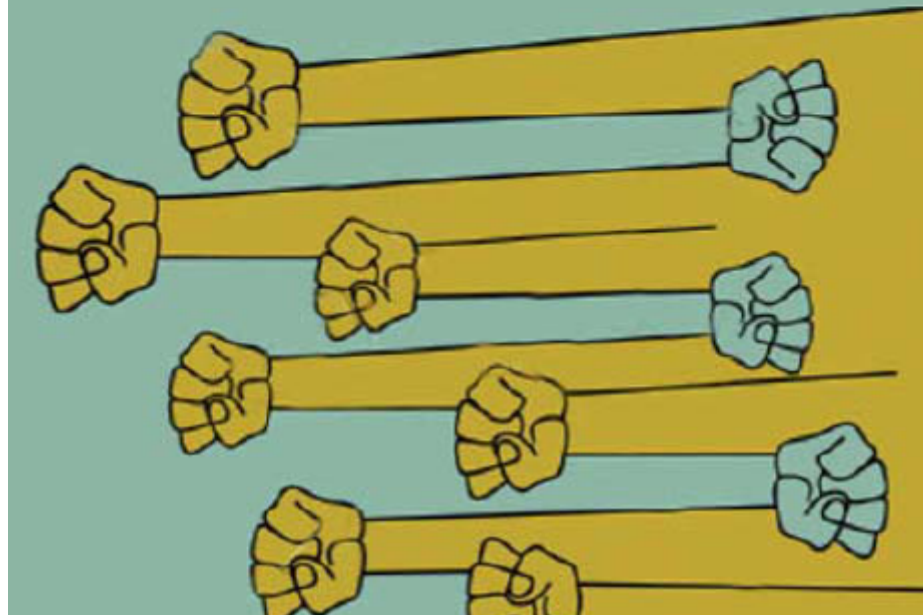
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Cornell University Press, 2011

# Solidarity Transformed

**Labor Responses to Globalization  
and Crisis in Latin America**

**Mark S. Anner**







# Transnational Activist Campaigns

- Advantages:
  - Use of normative power (“sweatshop” practices..)
  - Possibilities/need for new alliances (students, women’s groups, etc.)
  - Very flexible.
- Disadvantages: weak structural power (capital mobility); short-term; power imbalances.

# The Case of Russell in Honduras



- Massive firings for trying to form a union.
- Honduran union: ties with US unions & students.
- Shaming brand; protests; “facebook wall attacks” “twitter bombs” clandestine actions at retail outlets; visit Warren Buffett’s house; worker tours.
- Outcome: strong union/good collective bargaining.



New challenges...



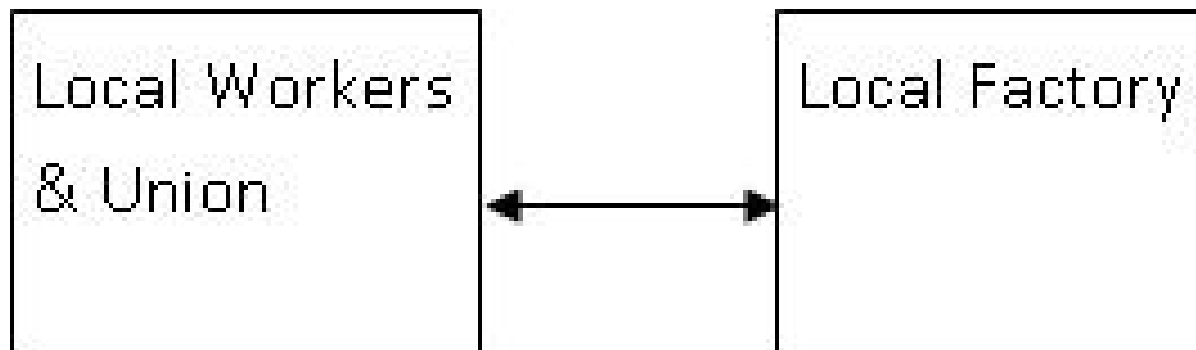
# Apparel Sector: Lower Prices, Less Rights



Source: Anner, 2012



# Getting Beyond Short-term victories; narrow struggles



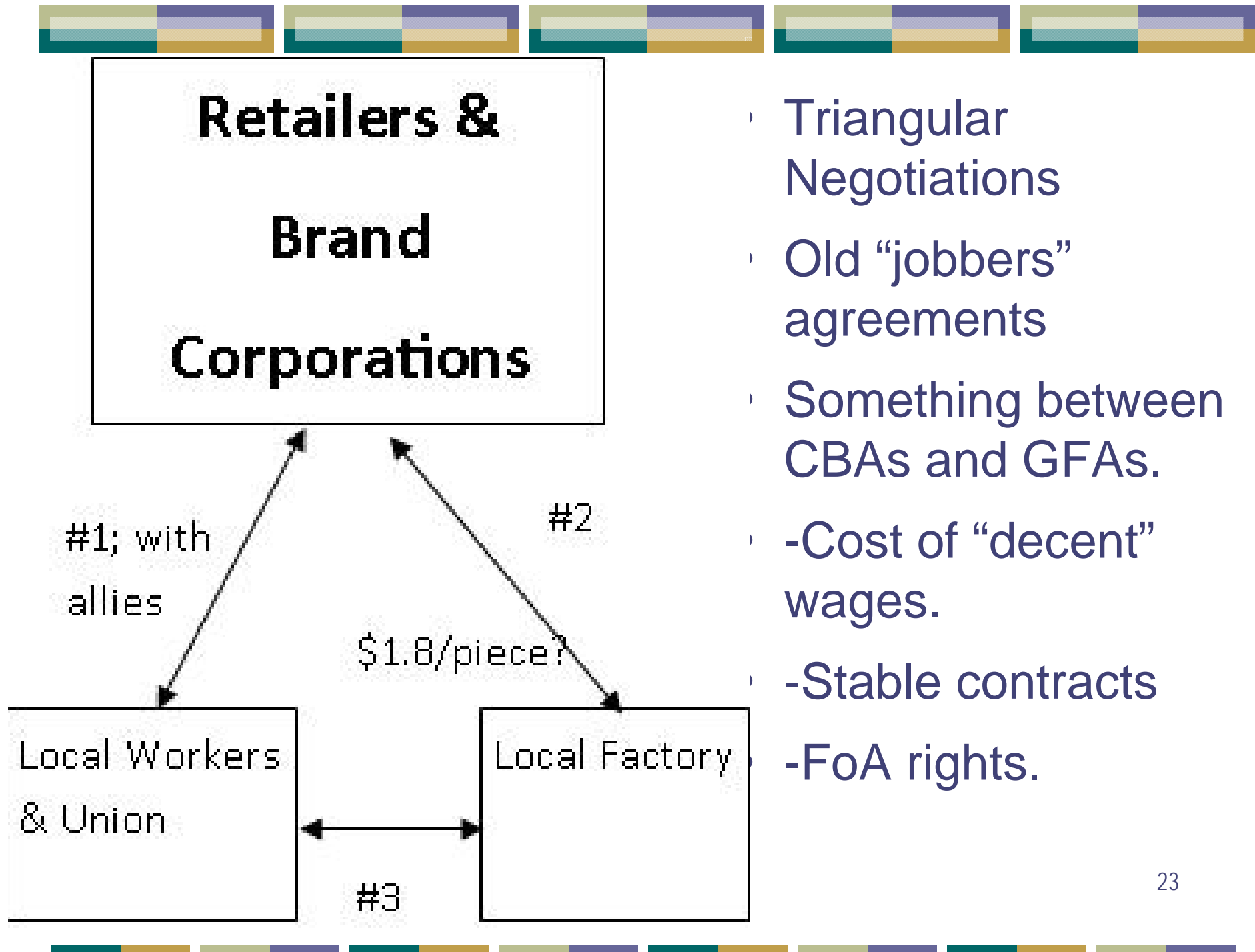


**Retailers &  
Brand  
Corporations**

\$1/piece

Local Workers  
& Union

Local Factory



- Triangular Negotiations
- Old “jobbers” agreements
- Something between CBAs and GFAs.
- Cost of “decent” wages.
- Stable contracts
- FoA rights.

# Violations by Brands

(Anner, FLA database); FoA=Freedom of Association







Another world is possible.

But it will take lots of good, young,  
internationalist organizers/researchers  
like yourselves.

Thank you.  
Muito obrigado!





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