

A decorative graphic consisting of a grid of grey dots of varying sizes, with several dots highlighted in red. The dots are arranged in a way that suggests a map of South America and parts of North America.

Trade Unions in Transformation

The Power of Aviation Unions in South America: The ITF LATAM Union Network

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- The ITF LATAM Union Network provides important lessons on how to build transnational union power. It is a unique success story of South American trade unions in improving wages and conditions for workers in the region's largest and, arguably, most anti-union airline multinational company. This international network includes pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and mechanics from 11 countries, 33 unions and six union federations, all supported by the global federation of transport unions, the ITF.
- Drawing on the support and advice of such a vast network, LATAM employees such as Peruvian mechanics and Argentinian cabin crews were able to increase and leverage their power. The workers were successful because they were committed to democratic union structures and developed strong relationships of trust with each other. Their local struggle was internationalized by a strategic campaign that widened support for the dispute and addressed company vulnerabilities.
- Trade Unions in Transformation is an FES project that identifies unions' power resources and capabilities that contribute to successful trade union action. This study features among two dozen case studies from around the world demonstrating how unions have transformed to get stronger.



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Abstract

The success of South American unions in improving wages and conditions for workers in the region's largest and arguably most anti-union airline multinational company provides us with significant lessons about how to build union power. The international network of LATAM unions includes pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and mechanics from 11 countries in 33 unions and six union federations, supported by the global federation of transport unions, the ITF. Two very different case studies, one from Peru and one from Argentina demonstrate that when the unions put long term resources into building their base, workers can withstand the firing of union leaders, monetary bribes to leave the union, threats to relocate their jobs and other forms of repression and win significant improvements in wages and conditions. These two case studies draw on in-depth interviews and field research as well as a power resources approach to analyse how these workers organised and secured major wins in seemingly impossible circumstances. Unions can be more successful utilising a sustainable approach to campaigning and organising that emphasizes a deep commitment to democratic union structures and strong relationships of trust between workers who are committed to class struggle. Without a strong base, employers can strike back against workers and destroy union organisation. With a strong base, workers and unions can more successfully utilise all the various forms of power available to them, including strategic campaigns that widen support for the dispute and address company vulnerabilities.

Introduction

In the last ten years, with the support of the International Federation of Transport Workers (ITF)¹, the aviation unions in South America have organised an international network of workers strong enough to force LATAM, the largest multinational aviation company in South America, to make seemingly impossible improvements in working conditions for thousands of aviation workers. The ITF LATAM Union Network began in 2006, and now includes 33 unions and six union federations in nine Latin American countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela) plus Spain and Australia.² All aviation sectors (pilots, cabin crew, ground staff, dispatchers and mechanics) are represented. The network has created a culture of solidarity across the diverse political environments, languages and unions in the region.³

LATAM Airlines operates under two major brands, LAN Airlines from Chile and TAM Airlines from Brazil.⁴ The

company began in Chile, when the Pinochet government privatised the Chilean national airline and has grown rapidly in the region by using predatory business practices to the detriment of smaller national flag carriers. This has, in turn, contributed to the mass termination of workers in many countries and the end of many unions and decent labour conditions.

Today, LATAM Airlines is one of the largest airline companies in the world in terms of the number of network connections and provides passenger services to 23 countries and cargo services to 28 countries. The company is headquartered in Santiago and has approximately 47,000 workers. Shares are traded both in Chile and on the New York Stock Exchange.

LATAM has used every possible method to prevent unionisation of its workforce. The company has paid workers extra to not be in the union, fired union leaders, and threatened the union with a lawsuit. In 2016 LATAM was fined 22 million US dollars by the US Security and Exchange Commission for bribing union leaders and government officials.⁵

This article examines the different forms of power that have been used by LATAM aviation workers, making the argument that the collective strength and organi-

1. The International Federation of Transport Workers (ITF) is a global union federation of around 700 unions representing more than 5 million transport workers from 148 countries.

2. LATAM Network Website. 2014. Santiago, Chile (accessed 2017, 20 February). www.organizatelatam.com.

3. LATAM Network ITF (English subtitles). 2012. Buenos Aires, Argentina. (accessed 2017, 20 February) www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BL_gb5Wg90.

4. LAN and TAM Airlines merged in 2012. The company continued to operate as two separate brands until 2015 when they rebranded as LATAM Airlines.

5. »LATAM Airlines to pay \$22 million over Argentine bribes case.« Reuters. Thomson Reuters, 25 July 2016. Web. 14 Mar. 2017; <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-latam-airlines-corruption-idUSKCN1051TL>.

sation of workers at the base is central to developing worker and union power. A description of the international structure and working methods of the ITF LATAM Union Network is followed by two detailed case studies from the LAN Peru mechanic's union and the LAN Argentina cabin crew union.⁶ The article draws practical lessons relevant to the many workers and unions around the world who are organising in the face of repression. A chronology of events is provided in the annex.

1. The Power Resources Approach

There are a number of theories that address how workers gain power. The power resources approach developed by labour researchers Stefan Schmalz, Klaus Dörre, E.O. Wright⁷ and others, identifies and lists a number of types of power that workers use (structural, societal, institutional and associational power), and emphasizes the strategic choices that are available to workers who have the capacity to use different avenues for increasing their power (Lévesque and Murray, 2010).

The power resources approach defines four types of power. *Structural power* includes workplace bargaining power such as strikes and the slowing down of production. *Societal power* is the ability of the workers and unions to mobilize other social actors on their behalf. *Institutional power* includes the regulatory and legal frameworks that workers and unions operate within. *Associational power* comes from workers uniting in collective organisation.

In this article, we argue that the ITF LATAM Network has succeeded by choosing to focus most centrally on building collective strength and leadership among workers, what Schmalz and Dörre (2014) call associational power. According to the authors, the concept of associational power includes increased level of member participa-

tion, the quantity or number of affiliated members, the strength of the relationships and connections between workers, and the internal capacity of the organisation to take action and grow. Erik Olin Wright (2000) uses the term »working class associational power« to differentiate the associational or collective power of employers from the associational power of workers.⁸ Wright defines working class associational power as »the various forms of power that result from the formation of collective organizations of workers«⁹.

In addition to the definition of working class associational power used by Wright and the attributes listed by Schmalz and Dörre, we define (and go on further to describe) associational power as including a high level of commitment and political understanding by workers with a goal of increasing power for the working class, a long term view of organising and campaigning, democratic union structures with union leadership developed and elected from rank and file members, and strong relationships between workers.

To build associational power, worker education is a necessary part of the process. The ITF Education Officer Alana Dave, who has supported the work of the LATAM Network from its inception, makes a distinction »between an apolitical approach to education work which is skills based, and deep education work that includes workers learning from each other to build collective consciousness, critical awareness, and the political confidence to organise on the basis of shared interests«¹⁰.

Central to associational power is a high level of trust between workers and between workers and their union. Workers need to be able to access union leaders and structures at the local, the regional and the global levels. Associational power is more than simply the number of union members in the workforce (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). For associational power to be long lasting it must be led by workers organising other workers and it must be located within democratic unions and membership based organisations.

6. The authors' work with the ITF LATAM Union Network from its inception has allowed them privileged access for over a decade to the internal workings of the network, its member unions, and the company. For this article, the authors also recorded eight interviews by audio and video with union leaders from LAN Peru and LAN Argentina between July and August 2016. Additional interviews with five ITF representatives who work with the network were added in January and February of 2017.

7. Schmalz, S./Dörre, K. (2014): »Der Machtressourcenansatz: Ein Instrument zur Analyse gewerkschaftlichen Handlungsvermögens« (The Labour Power Resource Approach: An Instrument for the Analysis of Unions' Strategic Action), *Industrielle Beziehungen* 21(3): 217–237.

8. In this article we will assume the words »associational power« to be synonymous with »working class associational power.«

9. Wright, E. O. (2000): »Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests and Class Compromise«, *The American Journal of Sociology* 105(4): 957–1002.

10. Interview, 13 February 2017.

In the face of an unprecedented anti-worker agenda globally, and the increased concentration of power in transnational companies, many unions are growing their capacities to use strategic corporate campaigns, to successfully publicize injustices to a wider public (societal power), to take advantage of strategic leverage points of production or global supply chains (structural power) and to influence institutional and regulatory institutions (institutional power). The ITF LATAM Union Network has used all of the forms of power identified by the power resources approach, but have centered their strategy on strengthening associational power in order to achieve a sustainable and permanent presence in the region.

The work of the ITF LATAM Network of Unions shows that if we turn to other forms of power (structural, institutional and societal power) as a *substitute* for associational power, we can create weakness instead of strength. If associational power is not strong, when confronted with increased use of institutional, societal, structural power by the union, employers will use their capacity to break the union's collective strength at the base through firings, physical violence and threats, jailing, misinformation and propaganda and/or bribes, promotions, and the creation of »yellow« company unions.¹¹ Conversely, if associational power is first established, the other sources of power are easier to access by the workers and their unions.

The authors argue that the strategy of the network has been to increase the capacity of LATAM workers to use structural, institutional and societal power as a tool that enhances their associational power, not as an alternative for associational power. During the first 11 years of the network, from 2003 to 2014, the unions did not confront the company at the international level other than to ask for a meeting (which the company has yet to grant). The decision to move strongly against the company with an international campaign in support of the Peruvian mechanics in 2014 was because the mechanics had built their base to a level that the workers could withstand severe repression from the company.

11. Offe, C. and Wiesentahl, H. (1980) describe the necessity of associational power to workers in detail (as contrasted to employers who are not inherently dependent on their associational power): »In the absence of associational efforts on the part of workers, the conflict that is built into the capital/wage labor relationship is bound to remain very limited.«

Unions face many challenges to building associational power, but as the successes of the ITF LATAM Network show, it is possible to build associational power even in the most difficult of circumstances. Without the strengthening of the associational power of LATAM workers as a primary focus, the use of the other forms of power identified by Schmalz and Dörre¹² were not available to LATAM workers. When a company is willing to engage in anti-union practices, the use of other forms of power when workers are not strong on the ground can be dangerous, as this has the potential to create increased repression from the company that is either aimed directly at the workers or at further isolating workers from each other and from their unions.

2. The ITF LATAM Union Network

History, Structure and Financial Resources of the International Network

The first international meeting of the network was held in 2006, with seven Argentinean and Chilean cabin crew travelling to Lima for the founding of the union of cabin crew in LAN Peru. In 2008, the ITF created organizational structure and funding for the network.¹³ The ITF LATAM Union Network has now supported the negotiations of over 60 collective bargaining agreements. Eleven new unions have been created in an extremely anti-union environment. Between 2008 and 2014, the number of LATAM workers who are union members grew by 193 per cent. The LATAM network leaders have affiliated nine unions to the ITF.

The ITF structures provide the LATAM unions with critical support at the regional level through the ITF America's office, at the sectoral level through the ITF Aviation Section, and at the international level through the ITF headquarters office. The network holds two international meetings a year that are attended by approximately 50 to 60 LATAM union leaders. These meetings are where practical information, skills and analysis are shared and collective plans are made to assist each of the unions in confronting the company. The meetings are open and

12. Schmalz, S./Dörre, K. (2014): »Der Machtressourcenansatz: Ein Instrument zur Analyse gewerkschaftlichen Handlungsvermögens« (The Labour Power Resource Approach: An Instrument for the Analysis of Unions' Strategic Action), *Industrielle Beziehungen* 21(3): 217–237.

13. For a calendar of network events please see Appendix I: Chronology.

include any LATAM workers who can attend, as well as unions who are not yet affiliated to the ITF, and unions who do not represent LATAM workers but want to learn our strategy and way of working.

Given the large amount of union organising and growth created by the LATAM unions, the financial costs of the network are low in comparison to other multinational organising and campaigning work. This is due in large part to the network's reliance on LATAM workers and unions to do the organising, campaigning and research work. The total financial budget of the ITF LATAM Network has been approximately 85,000 US dollars annually for the last 10 years.¹⁴ The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation (FNV Mondiaal) has assisted with funds for the part-time network coordinator (who is a LAN Argentina cabin crew member), as well as with part-time country coordinators for the network (also LATAM workers), and a part-time media resource person from Chile. The German foundation Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) has provided financial support for logistics, lodging and travel for two international meetings a year. The ITF provides on-going monetary resources and access to curriculums, research, communications and legal resources.

A Culture of Learning and Solidarity

Creating an environment of trust and learning has been critical to the work of the unions in the ITF LATAM Union Network.¹⁵ The twice-yearly international meetings usually last two days. The meetings begin with updates from the unions. Leaders report by country and sector on campaigns and challenges that the workers and the unions are facing. A significant amount of time is spent deepening relationships and understanding each other's legal frameworks, union practices, democratic structures, and cultures. The unions are continually working with conflict and differing interests as they plan how to meet the needs of the base through international action. The participants learn from each other's experiences in a facilitated educational workshop type setting. All meet-

ings close with clear and specific plans for action that includes specific dates, names and commitments. The ITF LATAM Union Network moves forward at the speed that the various unions are ready. Each union has its own history, culture and method of working. Rather than attempting to have all the unions do the same activity at the same time, the network supports whatever work the unions are doing that will increase their power.

The agendas for the international meetings change, but always include deep educational work that is collective. In 2009, the second year of the ITF network, we spent two days in Lima on computers researching the company together and sharing information. The LATAM union leaders used curriculum materials on strategy and research from the ITF campaigns manual.¹⁶ They researched the company's shareholders, sponsorships of sporting events, passengers, cargo customers, governments, political elites, and tourism companies. More recently, in 2016, the network organised a 2-day international workshop for union leaders on how to best use social and news media in campaigns.

Many of the international networks' meetings focus on sharing organising methodologies. One of the most important parts of the ITF organising curriculum for the LATAM unions has been a section entitled »arbolitos« or »little trees«. Arbolitos are small networks of workers, usually consisting of groups of one to five workers who are in communication with each other and are connected to a union leader. This method was used in Central America during the 1970s and 1980s during times of intense conflict. The Argentinean cabin crew union named the method »arbolitos«, and the ITF has continued to use that terminology globally. The term »arbolitos« emphasises the constant need for pruning, nurturing and fertilising these worker communication networks.¹⁷

In 2012, the union leaders began to meet internationally by sector in addition to the regular biannual network meetings. The Chilean cabin crew union organised a two-day international workshop of cabin crew to compare wages and conditions. Subsequently, the LATAM

14. The approximate annual breakdown of the ITF LATAM Union Network budget is: FNV Mondiaal 50,000 euros, FES 15,000 euros and ITF 20,000 euros.

15. In keeping with the power resources approach, Lévesque and Murray (2010) outline four ways in which unions build their capability to use the different forms of power available to them: intermediating, framing, articulating and learning capabilities. The ITF LATAM Network of Unions uses all of these capabilities.

16. Conrow, T./Banks, A. (2016): *Developing Strategic Campaigns: An ITF Manual for Trade Union Activists, Educators and Organisers*. International Transport Workers' Federation. Online version: <http://www.campaignsmanual.org/>.

17. Conrow, T. (2011): *ITF Organising Manual*. International Transport Workers' Federation. Online version: <http://www.itfglobal.org/en/resources/training-education/organising-manual-1/organising-manual/>

mechanics union leaders met together to both compare conditions and to create a regional mechanics survey. The mechanics survey showed that 84 per cent of LATAM aviation mechanics reported that they had been pressured to finish work at the expense of quality and/or safety. The survey results were picked up by local and international media.

The experience of the LATAM network shows that when workers succeed in organising and campaigning they teach others. Once the LAN Colombia cabin crew union organised for and won a collective agreement despite the company offering monetary benefits to individuals to leave the union, the cabin crew taught their organising skills to the LAN Colombia mechanics who then unionized. In another of many examples, the leaders of a Chilean ground handling union travelled to Ecuador to help the ground handlers there to form a new union.

The network has also encouraged the cooperation between unions at the national level in order to produce more bargaining power. As a result of relationships strengthened through the network meetings, the Argentinean aviation unions re-established the national aviation federation (Federación Argentina de Personal Aeronáutico, FAPA) created in 1974 but banned in 1976 by the military government. In 2009, a company-wide strike by LATAM workers forced the company to negotiate with the new FAPA. Today, FAPA continues to negotiate directly for the salaries for all sectors of aviation workers.

Antonio Rodriguez Fritz, the ITF Americas Regional Secretary, has strongly promoted »transport unions in the region to structure themselves by industry rather than by company. The structures of company-based unions are weaker, more fragmented and thus more vulnerable.«¹⁸ The LATAM network unions have supported the unions in this work. In Ecuador, the cabin crew union was expanded to include other aviation workers. In Peru, the aviation unions are discussing possible mergers. In Chile, when the network first began there were 37 unions registered with the company. Through the restructuring work of the Chilean unions and the network there are now 12.

18. Speech at the Civil Aviation Regional Conference Americas, 15 September 2016.

Ingo Marowsky, the ITF Global Head of Supply Chain and Logistics Organising Projects explains that »the ITF has expanded on the success of the LATAM network by establishing a new network of unions in Avianca, the second largest airline company in the region. The Avianca unions have different challenges and needs but are following a similar working methodology to the LATAM network. We have already seen some tremendous successes with first-time collective agreements for Avianca workers in Chile and outsourced ramp workers in Colombia.«

Gabriel Mocho Rodriguez, the ITF Civil Aviation Secretary, further emphasizes that »the organising methodology and the experiences gathered during the years of the LATAM network building have been critical to other ITF organising campaigns globally. This is particularly true with Qatar Airways where the workers are under strong pressure from the management and in an adverse legal framework to organise themselves. The ITF Civil Aviation Section has used the lessons learnt to inspire other workers in similar conditions and used the framework to help in building other campaigns. The LATAM project methodology is not a recipe that can be imposed in other regions but instead a successful path that can be adapted and followed to succeed.«¹⁹

Two Case Studies – LAN Peru and LAN Argentina

The ITF LATAM Union Network provides international coordination for campaigns that are developed by the member unions. Two case studies from the network, one from the mechanics union of LAN Peru and the other from the cabin crew union of LAN Argentina demonstrate concretely the vulnerabilities that can be created if unions rely on other forms of power as a substitute for associational power. In both cases, the ITF LATAM Network of Unions made a strategic and conscious choice to invest time and effort in support for the union's organising at the base of the workforce, knowing that was where the unions would be most vulnerable.

The LAN Peru mechanics and technicians union (SITA-LANPE) built strong associational power, beginning in 2012, in preparation for an important negotiations cam-

19. Interview, 15 February 2017.

campaign in 2014. Once they had created strong associational power, the union was able to fully utilize all the various forms of structural, institutional and societal power available to them very strategically and effectively.

SITALANPE was created in 2006 and did not begin their campaign with much institutional, structural or societal power. They had never had a strike or demonstration in the history of the union, the wages and conditions were amongst the lowest in the region and they had not had a wage increase for ten years (weak structural power). The right to strike in Peru is not as protected as in Argentina (weak institutional power), and the union had not yet entered into the public arena to gain support for their cause in the wider society (weak societal power).

In contrast, Aeronavegantes, the union of the LAN Argentina cabin crew, was formed in 1953 and had a history of tremendous structural, institutional, and societal power. The union has had control of the hiring process through a union-run cabin crew school and strong political and legal power in the country. In 2001, the aviation unions in Argentina had won a huge campaign to save the national flag airline from bankruptcy and destruction. In 2008 the unions forced the government to re-nationalize the same airline. Despite these high levels of structural, institutional and societal power, the Argentinian cabin crew union had been unable to recruit significant numbers of members and delegates from LAN Argentina due to the anti-union practices of the company.

In 2008, Aeronavegantes made a strategic choice to change from an over-reliance on institutional, structural and societal power and focused on slowly and carefully building the base of workers (associational power). With the base of workers more organised they were able to win union recognition and the reinstatement of their fired leaders, and finally, in 2015, a legal collective bargaining agreement.

3. LAN Peru Mechanics Union (SITALANPE)

The Formation of the LAN Peru Unions

LAN Peru grew out of the destruction and bankruptcy of the national carriers Aeroperu and Aerocontinente. When Aeroperu was closed in 1996, 1,300 unionised

workers were terminated. LAN Chile created a base in Peru using Peruvian staff. The goal was to increase market share for what would soon become LAN Peru. With massive unemployment in the aviation sector, workers were forced to accept lower salaries and conditions without union representation or bargaining rights. The company grew quickly in Peru and now controls the majority of the passenger market in the country.

By 2005 LAN Peru workers had started to organise against the abusive working conditions. Ivan Jara, the current leader of the mechanic's union remembers that »when I started, mechanics were working inhumane 24-hour shifts. The company operated like a tyrant. This is what caused us to gather together to begin the formation of the union.«²⁰ In 2007 the first collective bargaining agreements were signed by company based unions, first with the pilots and cabin crew and later with the mechanics, ground staff and dispatchers. When the company was not able to prevent the formation of unions, they changed their strategy. Union leaders negotiated collective contracts with small benefits for the workers and big benefits for the company.²¹

LAN Peru Mechanics Organise the Base

Two years before their next contract would expire, SITALANPE began preparing their base of 220 workers for the biggest struggle of their lives. The workers had not received a wage increase in over 10 years. This time the new union leaders systematically educated the base. Workers and leaders spoke in small groups at the workplace and in each other's houses, building deep relationships. They prepared themselves and their families for the firings and repression that they knew would come. All the intense and challenging work of building associational power was done by LAN Peru mechanics.

At the twice-yearly international meetings of the ITF LATAM union network, the leaders of the Peruvian mechanics' union gathered information about the regional strategies and profitability of the company, learned how other LATAM workers were organising and cam-

20. Interview, 21 July 2016.

21. According to Ivan Jara, »Those union leaders who negotiated our first and second contract had very little experience. They were not prepared enough, so we did not gain that much. We only were able to improve the hours and shifts.« Interview, 21 July 2016.

paigining, examined these strategies together with other unions, and assessed the vulnerabilities of the company. The new union leaders were young (most of them in their twenties and thirties) and were representative of the many young workers that the company had hired. Collectively the union created a well-developed analysis of why they had not received a wage increase in 10 years, why they were paid half of what aviation technicians were receiving for doing the same work in Argentina and Chile, and why one-third of the workers had been hired on temporary contracts with no job security.

Working together with the LATAM mechanics unions in the region, a cooperation agreement was signed, making the commitment to not break strikes from one base to the other. This was very important for the Peruvian mechanics because they had been very concerned about how they could stop the planes if the company was able to send mechanics from other countries to break their strike.

Negotiations and Conflict

The negotiations were scheduled to begin in January 2014. The leadership team of six aviation mechanics increased the level of the organising. They developed more leaders, all with strong social skills, who worked with each of the major workgroups assigned by shift. They spoke to workers 24 hours a day and in person. The goal of these initial conversations was to lessen everyone's fear, and further deepen personal relationships. The mechanics talked about the importance of dignity as workers and demonstrated a vision of how collectively their lives could change.

The second series of conversations focused on the workers' legal rights to organise and how to fight for their rights, not just for their own benefit, but for the future of their families and for all Peruvian workers. The leaders educated workers about everything that the company was saying and how to engage in a work-to-rule campaign. Haroldo Monzon, a LAN Peru mechanic, describes the beginning of the conflict »When we started the fight we were very clear amongst ourselves and we worked by the company rules. Every day there were a couple of aircraft grounded for safety reasons. When this started the company began their threats and pressure campaign.«²²

22. Interview, 22 July 2016.

In response to the work-to-rule actions, the company removed the union leaders from the jobs where they had contact with other workers. The company increased the hiring of workers on temporary contracts from one-third to one-half of the workforce. The union leadership team responded by going to the airport and waiting for the workers at the beginning and end of every shift. When the company fired the first two workers, the leadership team explained that this was part of the company plan to break the will of the mechanics. To fight back against the firings, the mechanics expanded the numbers of workers working to the company rules.

The company changed tactics and tried to buy the workers off with a significant bonus offer of 6,000 US dollars for each worker. The leaders explained that the workers should hold out for more money and a contract. They talked about why the company offer was too little and how by staying united they could get more. Everyone refused the bribes. This was a very strong moment for the union.

The company then selected twenty supervisors and senior mechanics and created a new company union (yellow union) that could negotiate for the mechanics.²³ Supervisors pressured workers daily on every shift to leave the union and join the new yellow group. Haroldo Monzon reports, »Those who were selected to form the new yellow union were arrogant and sexist. They used to say, »you work like a girl – pejoratively – without caring about the women mechanics who are our comrades.«²⁴ By this time, seven workers including Haroldo had been fired.

As the next set of negotiation meetings with the company approached, the union held assemblies for all the workers. The assemblies were large with 200 workers attending. The campaign intensified and the assemblies were held every 10 days. The leadership team continued going outside the airport to talk to co-workers four times a week, covering all the shifts and staying all day on Fridays and Saturdays.

23. As explained by Ivan Jara, LAN Peru mechanic and union leader, »The yellow union leaders were all supervisors. They asked the workers to stop supporting the union and threatened them with work assignment changes and lack of promotions.« Interview, 21 July 2016.

24. Interview, 22 July 2016.

Expanding Power

With their newfound and very strong associational power, the workers were able to implement a powerful work-to-rule action (structural power) and went on to expand their capacity to use all the other forms of strategic power available to them (structural, institutional, and societal power). During this time, two mechanic leaders were sent by the company to a smaller airport to minimize their contact with the base. Still, they managed to organise. If an aircraft was grounded for safety reasons in a small airport with little resources to fix it, it would result in even more delays and cancellations than at some of the larger airports.

By March 2014 SITALANPE was organising marches and pickets in front of the company headquarters that included the workers, their families and other Peruvian unions. The marches drew on the tradition of »plantones«, peaceful marches with families and workers. LATAM mechanics from Brazil, Chile and Colombia travelled to Lima to join the marches. There was a strong message of Peruvian pride against the multinational Chilean company during these marches. Cristian Cabezas remembers, »For the first time in my life I was marching wearing a national flag T-shirt with a logo of my union on it, asking for respect for both. It was so comforting to feel your own people and your own society supporting you«. ²⁵

Instead of using this national pride as a tool for organising with hate and anger, the Chilean mechanic leaders spoke to the workers about the importance of Chilean and Peruvian mechanics remaining united. The work of the LAN Chile mechanics was under threat because the company was attempting to save money by moving the repair of their large aircraft to Lima to take advantage of the lower labour costs. Together the unions created a deep message of international solidarity and unity in the face of social dumping.

Without the union being strong at the base this international unity would not have been possible. The Chilean and Peruvian workers would have succumbed to information from the media and the company and been divided. Oscar Angosto, General Secretary of SITALANPE explains, »When we began, there was no sense of exter-

25. Interview, 21 July 2016.

nal help, or foreign solidarity, it was not a mature idea. Now it is part of our way of working.« ²⁶

Additional international actions took place. Miami is a key hub for LAN Airlines. LAN is the annual sponsor there of one of the largest tennis tournaments in the world. Argentinean and Peruvian LAN workers met in Miami, and with the assistance of the U.S. Teamsters Local 769, flew an airplane over the event, trailing a banner that said »LAN Airlines: Delays and Cancellations«. This was supported by leafleting and banners on the ground. The ITF LATAM Network unions began leafleting and distributing stickers in airports in Chile, Colombia, Peru, Paraguay, Brazil and Ecuador to inform passengers and cargo customers about potential upcoming delays and cancellations of flights. Other LATAM unions in the region who were in disputes with the company coordinated their actions, further strengthening the societal and associational power of the unions ²⁷.

The company acted aggressively to the brand damage, and the retaliation against the workers was strong. The following month there was no progress during the negotiation sessions. The company started more firings and did not renew the contracts of the temporary workers who were most active in the union. Despite all of this, the mechanics voted overwhelmingly to strike and intensified their campaign to work to the company rules.

LAN hired a private investigator in Miami who confronted the pilot who had flown the plane banner over the tennis match, trying to determine who had paid him for his work. The company sent a threatening letter to the Peruvian mechanics union stating that they were going to sue the union in the United States for the actions in Miami. A legal reply was immediately sent to the company, explaining clearly that there was no basis for a lawsuit and that the union and their attorneys were fully prepared to meet the company in a US court. The legal threats continued, but in the end, no legal charges were ever filed. During this same time period, a suspicious car was seen outside during the worker

26. Interview, 17 May 2016.

27. In March 2014 the Chilean cabin crew at LAN Express took a 98 per cent strike vote as part of their own negotiation process. In support of the Peruvian mechanics union, both the Chilean cabin crew union, and the unjustly fired leader of the newly formed Ecuadorian aviation union united their struggles with those of the LAN Peru mechanics, organising international protests in the region.

assemblies in Lima with a driver who refused to identify himself and who, when confronted, made it known that he was armed.

In support of the LAN Peru mechanics campaign, the upcoming international meeting of the LATAM Union Network was held in Rio in May 2014 in order to prepare for the World Cup to be held in Brazil in June 2014. Despite strong social and political pressure on the Brazilian aviation unions to not create strikes or stoppages during the World Cup, the Brazilian unions added their demands (for better maternity leave and a bonus for dangerous work) to the campaign of the LAN Peru mechanics and organised an international press conference with the support of the ITF Americas office. The LATAM unions used mainstream media, business travel media sources and both Twitter and Facebook to spread information about potential delays to passengers, airports, journalists, tourism companies and World Cup fans. The unions reached out to specific travel agencies that were important to LAN and TAM. The governments in the region, including the Brazilian government, began to pressure the company to resolve the problems before the World Cup.

LATAM union leaders from throughout the region continued to travel to Lima to support the Peruvian workers in their assemblies. In April, the Chilean LATAM unions organised the first international union demonstration at the company's annual shareholders event in Santiago. In Argentina, the unions leafleted the airport with photos of the LAN Argentina managers who had been sent to LAN Peru to repress the union.

At the end of May, the company sent the highest-level manager of LAN Peru to the mechanics' hangar to give cash to the workers and ask them to leave the union and break the campaign. Cristian Cabezas was there and explains »in those meetings called by management there were no union leaders, but the mechanics stood firm. When the company said they were taking the airplanes and the work away, the workers said, ›go ahead, the planes cannot fly without us«. The union leaders had been preparing them for just such a scenario, explaining that the company could not fire all of the mechanics and people understood this and were even more radical after being threatened in this manner.«²⁸

28. Interview, 21 July 2016.

In the first days of June, the mechanics voted 100 per cent for a strike and the company began trying to bring in Chilean mechanics to replace them. The company only found eight Chileans willing to go. Only fifty Peruvian mechanics had joined the company yellow union, so it was clear that the strike would be a success. At the final hour and just before the start of the World Cup, an agreement was reached at the Ministry of Labour, and the Peruvian mechanics had won without a strike. The workers unanimously ratified a four-year agreement that included all temporary workers being given fixed term contracts and returning fired workers to their jobs. A majority of the workers received 50 per cent or more in salary increases along with a signing bonus.

All forms of power available to the LATAM unions had been utilised but from a base of strong associational power. Ivan Jara recalls that »without any previous experience of this, we learned together that even though the company has all the resources and the best attorneys of the world, we cannot be minimized. We know that deeply now and we will keep fighting. We know we are no longer little ants. We all grew our power together.«²⁹

4. LAN Argentina Cabin Crew Union (Aeronavegantes)

The Struggle Begins

In 2001, LAN Chile entered Argentina and hired 55 cabin crew to work on Chilean airplanes. The cabin crew were mostly young, with no experience in aviation or with unions. Some were hired from other bankrupted aviation companies. There was a lot of unemployment in the sector. Between 2003 and 2004 all of the cabin crew affiliated to the Argentinean cabin crew union, Asociación Argentina de Aeronavegantes (Aeronavegantes). However, not all of them trusted the union or understood their need to participate in the struggle.

By 2004, workers elected their first workplace delegates and began the negotiations for their first collective agreement. The company refused to negotiate. The union fought back with public demonstrations and denouncements against the company but without full involvement from the base. Aeronavegantes had a great

29. Interview, 21 July 2016.

deal of structural, institutional and societal power at the time and 100 per cent membership, but did not have sufficient associational power to fully utilize the other forms of power.

In 2005, with the support of the Argentinean government, LAN Chile created a subsidiary for their operations in Argentina, a separate company LAN Argentina. Under Argentinean law, only one union legally represents each sector, in this case, cabin crew. The legal union is the Aeronavegantes union. The company formed a new yellow union, ATCPEA, which did not have the ability to negotiate a legal collective agreement. So instead, the company negotiated with the yellow union over salaries and benefits, but without creating a legal contract. The (by now) 80 LAN cabin crew were promised that they would be first in line to work for jobs in the newly formed subsidiary, LAN Argentina. However, the company only selected twelve of these staff and gave these workers a special seniority and benefit package. The other workers were told they had to reapply for their own jobs with lower benefits and no seniority in the new company.

The yellow union worked with the company to blacklist many of the active Aeronavegantes members, forcing them to resign and drop all their seniority to enter LAN Argentina. Those Aeronavegantes members who were accepted into LAN Argentina were asked to quit their legal union and affiliate to ATCPEA. Many did, but with anger and fear. The Aeronavegantes union fought both the company and the yellow union with little success since they now had even less collective power at the base. The LAN Argentina cabin crew were now too frightened to speak to anyone from Aeronavegantes. The Aeronavegantes leadership felt that the LAN Argentina cabin crew were impossible to organise as they were too inexperienced and uninformed. The company expanded rapidly and hired many new young workers. Aeronavegantes continued to denounce LAN in the media and attempted to force the company out of the country, which frightened many workers and further distanced them from the union.

Organising the Base

In 2007, the Aeronavegantes leaders changed course with full support from the ITF LATAM Union Network. The union committed to reaching out the LAN cabin

crew again, this time with a plan to focus on very slowly and carefully building up trust and communication one by one with the workers. The strategic choice had been made.

Secret meetings were held at the houses of the handful of workers who were willing. Eventually, three LAN Argentina workers felt trusting enough of the union to come to Aeronavegantes for a meeting with cabin crew from other unionized companies who were willing to help organise LAN workers. The unionized cabin crew understood that if they did not organise the LAN cabin crew, their own wages and conditions would be threatened. The meeting was a success and the three leaders from LAN Argentina and 13 cabin crew from other union airlines were now committed to an organising plan. Their numbers were small, but they were determined.

The group began to organise social and sporting activities. The word union was not mentioned. The cabin crew organisers concentrated on soccer games, meetings in cafes and a disco event. The goal was to get to know the other workers. Small informal discussions were held comparing working conditions at the different companies. Eventually, the group organised workshops about duty time and other regulations affecting cabin crew. The workshops were held at neutral locations, sometimes in a university setting, to make it easier for LAN cabin crew to attend.

The union worked for a very long time in this manner, gradually building up a list of contact details for the majority of the now 380 LAN Argentina workers. Surveys on issues such as fatigue and low wages allowed the LAN cabin crew to get involved and begin to pressure the company while remaining anonymous. The work was slow and focused on relationship building and the regaining of the worker's trust in their union, but it moved forward. The organising was under constant and daily attack both from the company and the yellow union. Martin de la Cruz, a LAN Argentina cabin crew and former elected delegate, reports, »Our honest and transparent form of working began to bring us more affiliates, people who were convinced by our work and who very well informed. We were not yet the majority, but all of us were and are committed for the long term, and will remain so.«³⁰

30. Interview, 1 August 2016.

In July 2009, the first Aeronavegantes leader from LAN, Fabiana Brunner was fired. Within a short time, Aeronavegantes was able to place her into a job at another unionized airline with higher pay and better benefits, utilizing the union's power within the sector. With the growing strength and activity at the base, Aeronavegantes was able to successfully access its structural and institutional power.

Strikes and Delegate Elections

In September 2009, the aviation unions in Argentina united to take a strong step against LAN. The pilots, cabin crew, ground staff and supervisory unions, through FAPA, the federation of Argentinean aviation workers demanded that LAN negotiates wage increases jointly instead of separately. Their demand was supported by a strike of all the workers that closed the airport and delayed flights. The result was a total win for the workers with a twenty-one per cent wage increase, and the first formal recognition of Aeronavegantes at LAN.³¹

In October 2009, delegate elections for the Aeronavegantes union were held for the first time inside the subsidiary LAN Argentina. There was a deep discussion among the cabin crew organisers as to whether there were sufficient strength and involvement of the workers to take this step because the new LAN leaders would now be out in the open. There was fear that the company would increase its retaliation against both the workers and the new delegates and that the workers might sit back now and wait for their now official delegates to do the organising work, thus weakening the collective. The debate lasted into the night. These new leaders from LAN, along with the unionized cabin crew who were helping them, were by now experienced organisers and campaigners. They decided to move forward, fully understanding the risk they were taking.

The company responded. In November 2009, the company intervened in the internal elections of Aeronavegantes, and with the support of the judicial system, attempted to place an opposing list of leaders into the union, leaders who did not support the LAN organising program. Despite having legal protection for elected del-

egates, by the end of May 2010, 14 union organisers and delegates had been fired, including LAN delegates.³²

The cabin crew organisers ran a campaign demanding that the judicial system provides for a second free and fair election for the leadership of Aeronavegantes. Cabin crew demonstrated in front of the Aeronavegantes building, demanding a democratic election to take their union back. By July 2010, they had won the right to a second election and, with 80 per cent of the workers voting to support them, they regained control of the leadership of their legal union. Dina Feller, who had been fired for union activism in May, was elected as the first ever LAN representative on the Executive Board of Aeronavegantes.

Edgardo Llano, General Secretary of APA, the powerful Argentinean ground staff union and President of FAPA, the federation of Argentinean aviation workers,³³ emphasises the importance of this moment for the LAN Argentina unions:

The company was responding to our organising efforts so strongly that they interfered all the way into the Argentine justice system, utilizing the justice to create an accusation of union election fraud and putting different leadership into the Aeronavegantes union. We demanded another election for the leadership of the cabin crew union. We fought for this election and the government had to allow it. The secretary of the President of the country was on television talking about the interference by LAN into the government. We won the election very strongly. If the cabin crew had not won this fight for a clean and legal election of the leaders of their union, the same thing would have happened to all the other aviation unions.³⁴

This huge victory once again demonstrates that without the workers' strength on the ground – in other words, without associational power – the campaign within LAN would have been lost and the union would have come under the control of the company.

31. The strike demonstrated the use of what the power resource approach calls structural power.

32. Elected union delegates cannot be legally fired in Argentina during the time they are delegates and for a period of 12 months afterwards.

33. Asociación del Personal Aeronáutico (APA) Website: www.aeronauticosapa.org.ar and Federación Argentina de Trabajadores Aeronáuticos (FAPA), the Federation of Aviation Workers of Argentina.

34. Interview, 3 August 2016.

In November 2010, another strike of the united LAN Argentina unions resulted in the reinstatement of the two remaining cabin crew who had been fired earlier for union activity. Negotiating jointly through FAPA, the LAN pilots, cabin crew, supervisors, dispatchers, mechanics and ground staff also won wage increases of 30 per cent. During the strike, international and national flights of LAN and TAM in Buenos Aires were stopped for 20 hours. LAN continued to refuse to sign a collective agreement with Aeronavegantes even though the company had legal collective agreements with all of the other Argentinean aviation unions.

Winning a Collective Agreement

With their leaders back and the salary negotiations completed, the LAN cabin crew focused their energy on the fight for a legal collective agreement. The cabin crew created educational materials, including a popular quiz, about why a collective agreement is important. The company continued to use the yellow union to encourage workers to sign individual agreements. Workers were given a variety of benefits for joining the yellow union, including special bonuses and even flowers. The yellow union promised that you could join or leave at any time, that this was a »free world«.

The Aeronavegantes cabin crew had taken a strong and principled decision from the beginning not to attack ATCPEA leadership and members. All LAN Argentina cabin crew want improved wages and conditions and the only difference between the workers was in the understanding of how we could get there. Whenever the company would give to yellow group members some special benefit in an effort to prevent the growth of the Aeronavegantes union, the Aeronavegantes leaders would both celebrate the improvement and work to educate the workers on why and how the company decided to make the improvement and the need for a legal collective agreement. One of the Aeronavegantes delegates, Lujan Reig describes this way of working:

After years of this work, people saw that we were transparent and honest. We worked well together with each other and with others. We did not attack the members of the yellow union. We wanted peo-

ple to choose our union for our ideals and our commitment. Even though it took us a lot longer and was more work, we were doing things the correct way.³⁵

With a final push from all of the united Argentinean aviation unions, LAN Argentina finally agreed to a legal collective agreement with Aeronavegantes. It was signed in January 2015 and is current now. The entire international network of LATAM unions celebrated. It had taken over 15 years to win. There are now two countries left in the region without legal collective agreements for LATAM workers, Ecuador and Paraguay, and they are receiving full support in their struggle from all of the aviation unions in the region.

Lujan Reig, one of the LAN Argentina cabin crew leaders explains how Aeronavegantes won: »LAN Argentina cabin crew have changed a lot. Because of the growth of participation at the base, we have moved from having no dialogue with the company to where we are today, where the company has to sit down with us and negotiate our legal agreement.«³⁶

The company continues to use the yellow union to try and divide people. Geraldine Elola, an elected delegate and one of the first leaders in the campaign to organise LAN cabin crew, explains how the workers are continuing to unionise: »Our success comes from taking action, improving conditions wherever we can for our co-workers, individually, in small groups, as well as for the whole. Our co-workers know we will fight for them and the company respects us because they know that we have the ability and the organization to stop flights when that is what is needed.«³⁷

In 2015, the unions began working under the new national neoliberal government of President Mauricio Macri. The former CEO of LAN Argentina now serves in the President's cabinet. The Argentinean aviation unions are facing the harsh effects of the liberalization policies of the new government. The institutional power of the union is under attack, but the LAN Argentina cabin crew are continuing to organise and build power in this new environment.

35. Interview, 1 August 2016.

36. Interview, 1 August 2016.

37. Interview, 1 August 2016.

5. Conclusion

The stories of the LAN Argentina cabin crew and the LAN Peru mechanics demonstrate the central importance of strengthening associational power, independently of whether the union also has structural, societal and or institutional power. Unionized aviation sector workers, in general, have strong structural power, societal power and institutional power due to their ability to disrupt the flow of passengers and cargo, the critical role they play in issues of passenger safety, and their position within the transport sector. However, to survive and move forward in an anti-union neoliberal environment, aviation workers in South America have had to focus intently on building strong power at the base.

The LATAM network has drawn its strategy and ways of working from South American unions. The unions in the region work within a culture of strong left movements, left political parties and historic left governments that challenge neoliberal economic structures. There is a strong value placed on collective, long-term relationships and rank and file leadership. The network has benefited greatly from the fact that the elected leaders of the LATAM unions in the region are LATAM workers. The unions operate on a system of union leave time for elected leaders, which means that they remain LATAM workers while in elected part-time leadership positions. Sergio Dias the President of the Brazilian aviation federation representing over 35,000 aviation workers explains, »As busy as I am with the federation, I work as a cabin crew member for at least some days each month. Without flying I have no way of deeply knowing the real conditions of the cabin crew.«³⁸

In the 1990s, US-based organising and campaigning curriculums and frameworks were exported to Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. (Spooner, 2012; Wright, 2000; Conrow, 1995). Starting with PSI, some of the global union federations, including the ITF, also found them useful tools for union building (Conrow, 1996). The LATAM network has drawn on the work of these American and Anglo Saxon organising and campaigning methods but has put aside some parts of the approaches. Faced with anti-union pressure and repression, the US based methodologies sometimes focus on campaigning and organising in a way that can give

short-term wins at the expense of some longer-term goals. At the same time, they provide a useful set of skills for network unions when they are applied collectively by LATAM workers to the practical challenges they are facing. In contrast to the American and Anglo Saxon frameworks, the LATAM network methodology includes a deeper commitment to building democratic union structures, a longer-term view of campaign and organising work, a deep and constant commitment to worker education and a conscious rejection of outside staff organisers and campaigners.

Education work is embedded in the work of the ITF LATAM Union Network and inseparable from the work of building the base. Building the base (or organising workers to increase associational power) without education is simply mobilizing workers to act without building leadership. Education work without organising the base increases the skills of particular leaders but does not create the collective conversations and consciousness necessary to move forward.

All of this speaks to the need for a clear elaboration of what we mean by associational power. Lévesque and Murray have defined associational power to include not just high membership numbers, but also the active participation of union members and an efficient organisational structure (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). The concept of associational power needs to be further expanded to include strong relationships of trust between workers, truly democratic union structures, and workers who are committed to the class struggle.

Despite the many successes of the ITF LATAM Union Network, there are more challenges ahead. The network grew up during a time of popular-left governments in some of the countries in the region. The unions are now facing a changing political environment with an increasing number of anti-worker and neoliberal governments. Qatar Airways, a company known for its highly anti-union practices, has recently purchased a 10 per cent share in LATAM.

While the network has had tremendous successes, LATAM is still refusing to bargain collective agreements with newly formed aviation unions in Paraguay and Ecuador. Despite strong international campaigning by the network, the company also refuses to rehire unjustly fired union leaders in Peru and Ecuador, including Jime-

38. Interview, 16 February 2017.

na Lopez the founding president of the first aviation union in Ecuador. The company continues to reject offers to meet with the ITF union network at the international level.

In order to face these challenges, we need to deepen and strengthen the work of the network. The ITF LATAM Union Network has a strong team of international union leaders who trust and learn from each other. The union leaders have built strong connections not only through the twice-yearly meetings but through working on each others campaigns.

The LATAM workers and their unions need to extend their international work further into the base. Most LAN Peru mechanics, for example, will be able to tell you the story of the mechanics campaign and the importance of international solidarity to their union but are not likely to know about the struggles of the LAN Argentina cabin crew or the newly formed Ecuadorian union.

The LATAM unions have begun this work. Rank and file LATAM workers have leafleted passengers at airports, attended international meetings and protests, worn stickers, signed petitions, refused to participate

in breaking strikes, and have distributed information on social media, all to improve wages and conditions in other countries. An online video explaining the history of the international union organising and campaigning in LATAM has been watched by thousands of LATAM workers.³⁹

The numbers of LATAM workers participating in, organising and leading international activity against the company are still too small. An increasing number of LATAM workers in the region who know each other's stories and conditions, who know how the company works in the region, and who contribute to each other's struggles directly is urgently needed.

The ITF LATAM Union Network has been fortunate in that the South American unions have been able to commit to an often slower, less resource intensive, and long-term approach to organising and campaigning. With an even stronger emphasis on strengthening the power at the base, the hope is that organised workers will be able to face the many challenges ahead.

39. LATAM Network ITF (English subtitles). 2012. Buenos Aires, Argentina. (accessed 2017, 20 February) www.youtube.com/watch?v=1BL_gb5Wg90.

Annex

1953	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Argentina cabin crew union created (Aeronavegantes)
2004	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First delegates elected in LAN • Company refuses to negotiate a collective agreement
2005	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ATCPEA, the yellow union of cabin crew created
2006	ITF LATAM Union Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting of the LATAM network unions from Peru, Argentina and Chile
2006	SITALANPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAN Peru aviation mechanic union created (SITALANPE)
2007	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aeronavegantes begins to reorganise the base
2008	ITF LATAM Union Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ITF LATAM Union Network created with international support of FNV and FES
2009	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second delegate elections • First Aeronavegantes leader from LAN Argentina fired • Airport strike by FAPA results in joint wage negotiations for the unions and the first formal recognition of Aeronavegantes
2010	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 Aeronavegantes delegates and leaders fired • First executive board member elected from LAN • Second strike of airport by FAPA and reinstatement of the remaining fired cabin crew leaders
2012	SITALANPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SITALANPE begins organising the base
2012	ITF LATAM Union Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAN Airlines (Chile) and TAM Airlines (Brasil) merge to LATAM
2014	SITALANPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SITALANPE wins collective agreement with 50 percent increases and pending strike is cancelled
2015	Aeronavegantes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First legal collective agreement signed
2016	ITF LATAM Union Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatar Airways purchase 10 percent stake in LATAM • LATAM fined 22 million US dollars by US Security and Exchange Commission for bribing union leaders and government officials



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