A NEW ERA FOR LABOR ACTIVISM? STRATEGIC MOBILIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AGAINST BLACKLISTINGS

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Gowen 1A

Abstract:

This article examines whether and how international human rights law transforms grassroots mobilization strategies of labor activists. Drawing on original ethnographic research on the activism of the blacklisted workers in the UK, I show that there is a multi-layered process through which human rights norms are interpreted and mobilized first by legal advocacy groups, then by grassroots activists. Contrary to skeptics who argue that human rights have a “mainstreaming” and “individualizing” effect on labor movements, this research shows that by strategically embedding human rights language in their campaigns, blacklisted workers leveraged media attention and undertook a discursive change on trade union rights and human rights. Findings suggest that strategic mobilization of human rights differs from other mobilization efforts, since labor activists use human rights language primarily for the purpose of finding a sympathetic audience within a political environment in which trade unions are viewed as a regressive force in the economy.

Bio:

Filiz Kahraman is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science, and she is also a graduate fellow at the Comparative Law & Society Studies Center. Filiz's research centers on human rights and labor activism. In her dissertation research, Filiz examines the new strategies adopted by labor activists against the challenge of shrinking welfare states in Europe. She has been awarded numerous fellowships and grants, including the Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant from the National Science Foundation, the David J. Olson Graduate Fellowship for Labor Studies, the EU Center of Excellence Graduate Research Grant, the Chester A. Fritz and Boeing Fellowships for International Research and Study, and Individual Research Grant from the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies.

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