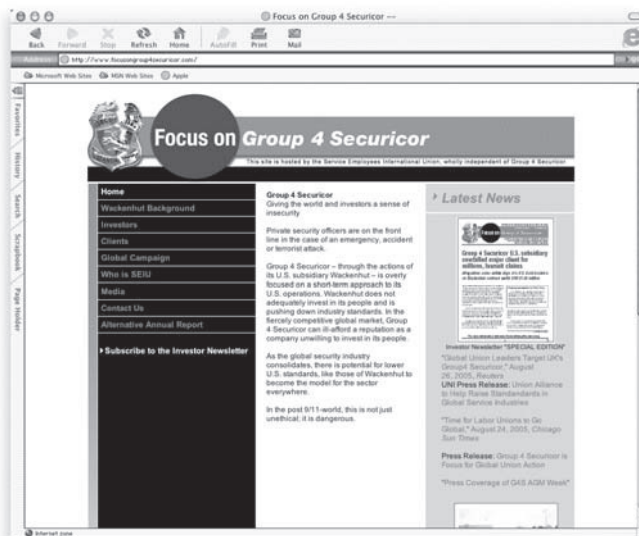


Global union to fight global capital

About 1 500 global trade union leaders emerged from the Union Network International's congress in August with the basis laid for the world's first global union in the security industry. **Harold Meyerson** explores the significance of this development which, at this stage, includes unions from South Africa, Kenya, Indonesia and the US.



Delegates attending the Union Network International's (an alliance of 900 unions from 150 countries) world congress explored a rather novel agenda - 'Imagine a Global Union'. They emerged from the meeting with the basis for the world's first global proto-union, comprising workers in the property services industry - that is, janitors and security guards.

Over the past half-decade, companies all over the world that have long provided the employees who guard and clean offices

and factories - including US-based security companies such as Pinkerton, Burns and Wackenhut - have been bought by a handful of largely European-based multinationals. The consequences, for both the employees and their home nations, have varied considerably. The guards at Pinkerton and Burns, for instance, are now employees of Securitas, a Swedish-based multinational known for providing extensive training and having good labour relations. But the employees of Group 4 Securicor, a British-Danish conglomerate,

have not been so fortunate.

In South Africa, guards at the airports have been reduced to working on month-to-month contracts with no benefits. While in Indonesia and Kenya, Group 4 has refused to deal with its workers' long-established unions. In the US, guards at Group 4's subsidiary Wackenhut work with poor health insurance for a company that has been fined repeatedly for labour law violations.

Not surprisingly, it's the union that's been organising security guards and janitors in the US the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), that has taken the lead in getting this global effort off the ground.

Not only do property service workers increasingly share common employers but guards and janitors hold jobs that cannot be relocated. There are also so many immigrants in this workforce that the global nature of the industry is apparent at thousands of work sites. At London's Canary Wharf, where janitors are endeavouring to organise, says SEIU's Stephen Lerner, architect of the union's Justice for Janitors campaign, the contractor is ISS, which employs thousands of US-based janitors. The building owner is Morgan Stanley and the workers come from Africa and Latin America. The workers, the companies, the capital is global. Everything travels across