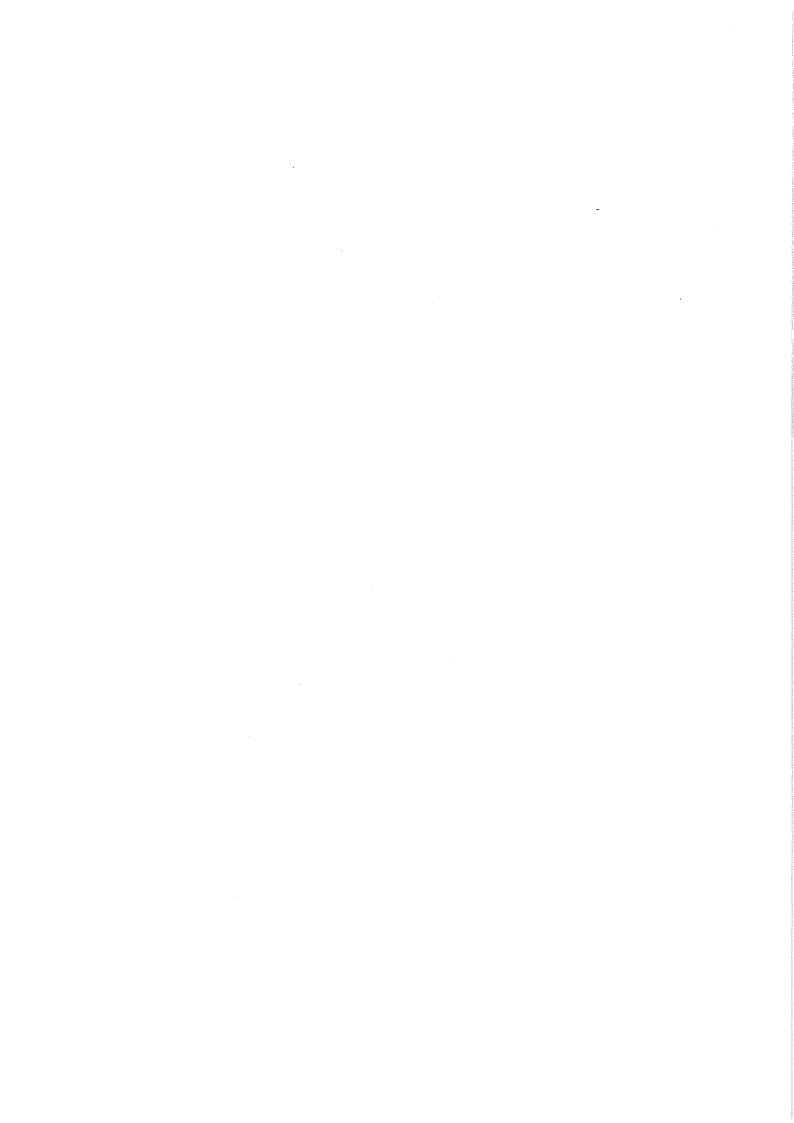# SOCIAL-MOVEMENT UNIONISM:
A NEW MODEL FOR A NEW WORLD

Peter Waterman

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Abstract: Traditional socialist trade-union theories or models have not prevented the frequent isolation of labour from other social movements, or the subordination of labour struggles to the ideologies and interests of other categories and classes. Such understandings are today an obstacle to emancipatory strategies. Theory related to the new social movements (particularly feminism), 1) surpasses the notion of a single class identity and interest, 2) Undermines a view of society as dominated by the economic and political spheres, and of social struggle as progressing from the first to the second, 3) suggests positive new relations between class, popular and democratic interests and demands, 4) provides a base for a new relationship with political parties, and 5) proposes a new view of the global and a new kind of internationalism. A ten-point theoretical/strategic definition of 'social-movement unionism' is offered which stresses the necessity and possibility for an intimate articulation of unionised with other workers, of labour with other social forces, and of shopfloor democracy with shopfloor internationalism. A test case offered to illustrate the argument is that of the relationship between an Indian feminist strategy for working women and recent South African trade-union experience. The conclusion is that 'social-movement unionism' offers a continuously renewable emancipatory strategy surpassing current liberal, populist and socialist ones.
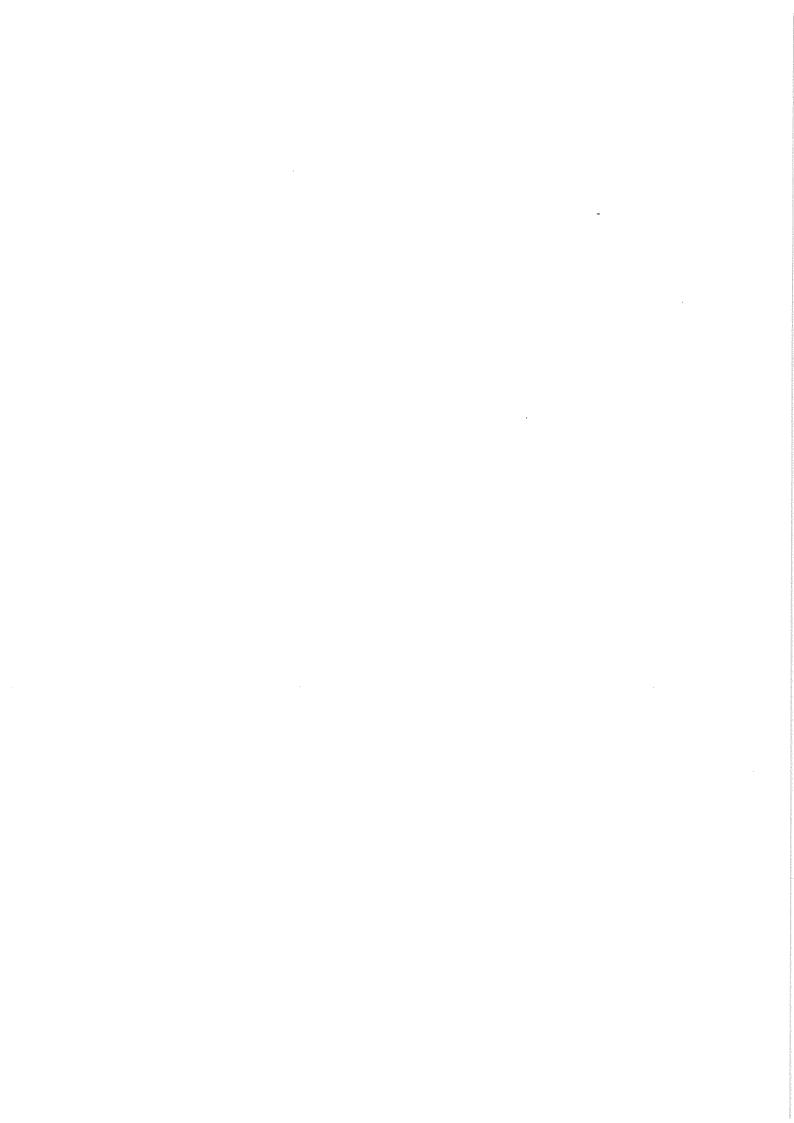
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CONTENTS

1. Introduction

There has for some years now been an informal and partly unpublished debate taking place around the concept 'social-movement unionism' (Lambert 1989, Lambert and Webster 1988, Munck 1988, Scipes 1991, Webster 1987, mostly summarised in Waterman 1991a). This literature criticises traditional trade-union theories/strategies, particularly socialist/populist ones. All the contributors have been concerned with developing a new theory and strategy which would help unions escape the impasses, isolation, subordination or manipulation that the old ideas have led to. Rather than repeating the discussion, I wish to here set out my own position economically and positively. This is difficult, firstly, because this position itself represents a synthesis of many others, and draws from worldwide experience and reflection. It is difficult, secondly, because I am by no means satisfied with my own synthesis. I am convinced that others could do this more elegantly and systematically. Perhaps this essay (in the sense of an attempt) will encourage or provoke them to do so.

The concept of social-movement unionism (SMU) is intended to relate to and be appropriate for our contemporary world. This is a world increasingly marked by the dramatic expansion and equally dramatic transformations of capitalist, military, state, imperial, technical and patriarchal forms and powers. It is also (and consequently) marked by the appearance of the so-called new social movements (NSMs – feminist, anti-militarist, human-rights, ecological, etc.) alongside such old ones as those of religion, nation or labour.

There have been different responses to this new situation, even amongst those who admit the changes. One has been to re-assert the centrality of capitalism and the primacy of the capital-labour contradiction. Another has been to see ours as a post-capitalist, post-industrial, post-Marxist, post-historical or post-modern era, and to see the new social subjects, identities and movements as replacing the working (or any other) class. A third has been to re-conceptualise and broaden the understanding of work and therefore the role of labour movements. I do not care for the either/or choice offered by the first and second position, largely because both seem to subordinate or exclude much human experience and protest. I prefer a synthetic (dare one say historical and dialectical?) view recognising both continuity and transformation. I am powerfully drawn to the third position, because it looks both backward and forward, and because it works up and out from an impasse the unions are presently in. But the overwhelming majority of the world's workers (including the traditionally-defined proletariat) is not unionised. And, even if defined as workers, the

overwhelming majority of the poor, powerless, marginalised and alienated are not unionisable. Furthermore, the major international movement of the present day is not so much a labour or socialist one as a broad and complex democractic movement. In so far as one can generalise about the NSMs as democratic movements, the case for looking at the unions from their angle rests here.

In what follows I will look in turn at some of the NSM theory (Part 2), offer a definition of SMU (Part 3), argue the value of the concept (Part 4), apply an Indian feminist model to the South African union case (Part 5), and draw a few conclusions (Part 6). The rest is up to the critically-minded reader.

2. The development of social movement theory

2.1. Classical labour movement theory

Before presenting NSM theory it may be useful to have at least an image of traditional socialist trade-union theory. A sophisticated contemporary representative of this is John Kelly (1988). He has important and original things to say about, for example, union bureaucracy (Ch.7). He takes forceful issue with 'post-Marxist' critics of traditional socialist union theory (Ch.5). At the end of a critical survey of both classical Marxist theory and contemporary (mostly West European) debates, he declares that:

> I think it is correct to say that the majority of workers are unlikely to attain
> class consciousness in the full Marxist sense, but it is wrong to conclude...that
> this invalidates the socialist project. For the reality of that project is that it
> will be carried through by a coalition of forces, with organised workers at its
> heart. This coalition will be composed of a small minority of class-conscious
> activists, but a large majority of people motivated by varying mixtures of self-
> interest (as workers, consumers, environmentalists, women, gays, pacifists, etc.)
> and progressive values. (303)

He then looks forward to economic/political crises which will sharpen worker grievances and undermine their confidence in capitalist normality:

Trade unions will play an essential role in this process as the principal agents of working-class mobilisation, but, as Marxists have always recognised, the unions must work in tandem with a mass socialist political party, something that Britain conspicuously lacks. One of our major hopes for the immediate future must therefore be that such a party emerges from the radicalisation brought about by the next wave of strikes to hit the British economy. Once that happens the full fruits of militant trade unionism can then be reaped. (304).

These passages, it seems to me, beg so many questions as to undermine the force of the argument. (Brevity here implies a polemical critique: the positive alternative will be spelled out in the rest of the paper). Here are some of the problems:

1. Class consciousness has been earlier defined by Kelly as theoretically-informed practice fusing economic and political behaviour amongst workers (89). Given the increasing fragmentation of Marxism as theory, the question arises of whose Marxism (Marx's? Trotsky's? Mao's? Kelly's?) should inform the economic and political practice. And of what is to happen in such other non-economic/political spheres as those of gender, ecological and ethnic relations, in which new emancipatory theories challenge traditional Marxist understandings.

2. The meaning of 'coalition' is nowhere spelled out by Kelly, nor is it today self-evident why workers or unions should be at the heart of such, rather than simply one of its necessary components (workers and unions are not necessarily the most anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, anti-militarist, anti-authoritarian, anti-pollution force).

3. The relationship between self-interest (economic?) and progressive (political?) values is dealt with only for workers, so that one is obliged to ask whether the 'progressive' values of women, gays and environmentalists mean the necessary adoption of the workers' theoretically-informed practice (i.e. somebody's Marxism).

4. Kelly has not told us what kind of mass socialist party he would like to see, nor gone into the problematic history of party-union relations internationally. At a time in which the party form, and its quasi-monopoly of political space, is being increasingly questioned by

the rise of autonomous democratic social movements, he reasserts the priority of the party (and apparently of _the_ party).

5. Most revealing of all, perhaps, is his assumption that economic crisis will lead to strikes, radicalisation, militancy and socialism. In so far as this argument is addressed to the future, it can never be disproven – though Kelly has critical words for Trotskyist arguments of a similar nature (48-51). Past and present evidence suggests that economic and political crisis can also lead to mass fascism (Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy), religious fundamentalism (North Africa), ethnic chauvinism (Yugoslavia), exhaustion and disorientation (Poland) and terroristic communism (Khmer Rouge, Shining Path). Most contemporary evidence is that – in so far as such crises have a positive outcome – the option is for what the masses call democracy – and this is often asserted against what the masses call socialism!

Kelly's argument, in brief, shows us the limitations of an analysis dependent on the discourse of 19th and early 20th-century Marxism. He can tell us much about workers and trade-unionism under West European liberal-democratic conditions but little about emancipation – even here. He accepts Marx's myth of the proletariat as the sole or primary universalising and revolutionary subject (contrast Lovell 1988). He therefore cannot respond as Marx did to the major progressive social movement of _his_ day. His failure, finally, to even refer to labour-movement experience internationally (under Communism, in the Third World) means that he has inevitably produced a Eurocentric theory – at a time when emancipatory thinking must both recognise and address itself to globalisation.

2.2. Origins of the new orientation

The notion of social-movement unionism evidently requires reference to the new social movements. From the later-1970s there began to develop a new body of theory, stressing social movements as the focal point of social transformation and therefore for social analysis. Reference was to 'new social contradictions', 'new social subjects' and, of course, 'new social movements' (women's, peace, ethnic, ecological, consumer, etc.). Those coming from the Marxist tradition were also drawing, implicitly or explicitly, from Marx, where he says:

> Communism is for us not a <u>state of affairs</u> which is to be established, an ideal
> to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the <u>real</u>

movement which abolishes the present state of things. (cited Arthur 1970:56–7. Original stress)

More specifically, they were drawing from Gramsci, and breaking with the notion of revolution as primarily the seizure of power plus nationalisation of the means of production:

> If the articulations of the social whole are political articulations, there is no level of society where power and forms of resistance are not exercised...The achievement of socialism...does not arise from an absolute moment represented by a radical break consisting of the seizure of power. It must instead be the result of a series of partial ruptures through which the ensemble of relations of forces existing in society will be transformed..What [this] refers to is a novel conception of the radicalisation and politicisation of social struggles, one which enlarges the field of confrontation and struggle to the whole of civil society. (Laclau and Mouffe 1981:20)

Within such a conceptualisation, worker struggles are neither condemned as 'economic/reformist', nor glorified as 'political/revolutionary', but recognised as representing one front or site of political struggle that must be articulated intimately with others if the 'present state of things' is to be abolished. In summary, and in distinction from an economic-determinist and class-reductionist Marxism–Leninism: the economic and social structure is seen as determined by political struggle; classes as shaped and re-shaped through struggle; all struggles are understood as political struggles; the problem is seen – simultaneously – as the interlocked and interdependent structures of capital, state, patriarchy, imperialism and racism; the end is not the grasping of state power and the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy, but the overcoming of exploitation and domination throughout society; this project is seen as realisable only by the articulation of the autonomous demands of different types of workers, of the working class and other 'working classes', of class, democratic and popular demands.

2.3. Characteristics of new social movements

In order to develop the above line of thought we will need to have at least a minimal understanding of the NSM thinking. Here are some brief but crucial images.

In discussing the newness of the new social movements in Latin America, David Slater (1985:2-7) identifies the following crucial characteristics: 1) new forms of struggle in relation to new forms of subordination and oppression (i.e. the generalisation of commodification, bureaucratisation and massification); 2) the fact that these new forms of subordination and oppression are not necessarily connected with or concentrated within the proletariat: they take autonomous form and expression, they are not necessarily anti-capitalist, and a new revolutionary subjectivity has to be created (rather than being assumed to inhere in the proletariat); 3) the high value given to empowerment at the base of society, to democracy within movements, to respect for differences and to a high standard of inter-personal relations. It is clear that, armed with even such a summary characterisation, research on contemporary social protest would reveal much that a traditional Marxist vocabulary (Capital, Class, State, Nation, Empire, Socialism) would inevitably conceal.

In another specification, differentiating the new social movements from the traditional labour movement, Alberto Melucci (1989:205-6) identifies four new structural characteristics. These are 1) the centrality of information (the struggle for that which is concealed, the struggle over the meaning of what is revealed), 2) new forms of organisation (e.g. informal, democratic, self-empowering), 3) the integration of the latent and visible, the personal and the political, and 4) a 'planetary' consciousness (a new kind of global awareness). Whilst, as we will see, these characteristics may not be as new as here suggested, the very recognition and assertion of their importance certainly differentiates the NSMs from traditional labour organisations - customarily centralised and bureaucratic bodies, dominated by their leaderships and/or outside forces, commonly seen as instrumental to other ends (Economic Development or Competitivity, Political Independence, The Revolution, Socialism).

Women, as we know, form over half of the world's population and do well over half of the world's work. Recent feminist reflection on the consciousness and self-organisation of women workers therefore tells us about workers as well as women, and has implications for the strategies of labour as well as women's movements. After considering case studies of women workers from India and Nigeria, Amrita Chhachhi and Renee Pittin (1991) put forward the following propositions: 1) the contradictory and historically specific impact of patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism leads to fragmented and diverse experiences, leading to multiple identities amongst both female and male workers; 2) such identities are selectively mobilised and asserted in response to specific forms of manipulation and repression; 3) the separation of the private and the public, the factory and the home, the personal and political

leads not to opposed spheres or strategies, but rather to a profusion and overlapping of identities, spaces and possible strategies; 4) the double burden of women's work can be as much an impetus to organising as an obstacle. Bearing in mind the worldwide 'feminisation' of waged work (sub-contracting, homeworking, casualisation, etc.), and the extent to which 'to be a worker is something relative' (for Peru alone see Parodi 1986, Yepez 1991), the recognition of the multiplicity of identities is deeply subversive of any assertion of a single, universal, primary or pre-ordained worker interest and union role. Chhachhi and Pittin go even further, pointing out the limitations on self-organisation of time (its availibility), place (location of work/struggle) and space (the creation of the psychological or strategic room for manouevre, negotiation and challenge). Such an awareness would seem highly relevant to a period marked precisely by 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1989:Ch.Part 3), with shifting 'boundaries' of domination, with popular perceptions of this, and with consequent possibilities for social-movement contestation. If, for example, labour movements continue to assume the time-place-space constellation institutionalised by tri-annual industry-level collective bargaining, or five-yearly national elections, they are unlikely to be able to even understand reactionary, conservative or anarchic popular responses to the increasingly violent disruption of traditional time-place-space relations by an increasingly globalised capitalism (for some evidence and argument from Africa, see Waterman 1990b).

Recognition of the increasing centrality of globalisation processes has been growing amongst those interested in new social movements and struggles against alienation. Anthony Giddens (1990) defines globalisation as such an intensification of social relations that the local is shaped by distant events. He considers that today local transformation can neither be understood nor influenced without an understanding of globalisation. The nation-state is increasingly felt to be either too big or too small to deal with the full range of contemporary social problems. Globalisation, for Giddens, has four main dimensions (none of which is prioritised): 1) the world capitalist economy, 2) the nation-state system, 3) the world military order, 4) the international division of labour. Confronting these we increasingly find the following four social movements (similarly non-prioritised): 1) labour, 2) democratic, 3) peace, 4) ecological/counter-cultural. Each of these in turn relates to a dimension of Giddens' 'realistic utopia' or post-scarcity system: 1) socialised (not social_ist_) economic organisation, 2) a coordinated and democratised global order, 3) the transcendence of war, 4) a system of planetary care. Giddens' model suggests the necessity of a new understanding of internationalism, which I am myself beginning to conceive of in terms of a movement from

labour and socialist internationalism to a 'new global solidarity' (that includes both labour and socialists).

2.4. The relationship of the class, the popular and the democratic

Such arguments evidently go beyond the rhetoric of proletarian messianism and populist nationalism – not to speak of the practice of vanguardist manipulation. It seems to me that they offer something much richer, more complex, and more relevant to experience and struggles in the contemporary world. But, even if Slater is reflecting on Latin America, Melucci is clearly reflecting on Europe. And, whilst Chhachhi and Pittin do deal in part with Asia and Africa, Giddens deals only peripherally with the non-Western world (or, for that matter, women). The question might therefore arise of whether such theorising is really relevant to – for example – Africa. Well, speaking of Africa, Michaela von Freyhold (1987:28-31) says the following:

> If one looks at working-class struggles in Africa without the blinkers imposed
> by an arbitrary scheme of working-class evolution and sees them as they were,
> embedded in popular movements right from the beginning, one becomes aware
> of a different type of working class history which revolves around some of
> the issues that were also at stake in [19th century] Europe [...] Since
> independence masses in Africa have been forced or persuaded to sacrifice their
> demands for democracy of whatever kind to the fetish of 'development'.
> Developmentalism, left or right, socialist or capitalist in rhetoric, has always
> consisted of the promise by the state to take care of development if only the
> masses kept quiet and did not resist the cooptation or suppression of whatever
> autonomous or semi-autonomous organisations they had [...] The central
> state...has proved incapable of producing the type of development that is
> compatible with the survival of the people and their cultures and so ecology
> groups, feminist groups and minority groups are beginning to combine their
> efforts to curb the power of the central states [...] There are similar concerns
> in the new social movements in Europe. This is no accident. Despite all the
> specific differences between underdeveloped and developed economies,
> capitalism is creating a global predicament which provokes similar answers.
> This would, of course, also be a good reason for new types of [international]
> solidarity movements...

Von Freyhold thus reminds us of the connections of recent labour movements in Africa with those which took place historically in Europe, and raises as a prospect the possibility for a new social-movement internationalism. Both elements are crucial to a new understanding of unionism.

2.5. The historical origins of the new movements

There was, of course, a time when the the old social movement (labour) or old social movements (labour and nationality) were the new social movements. Interviewing Melucci, Keane and Mier point out that all four of the features he considers novel were present in the 19th century labour movement! They suggest that contemporary movements may, in fact, be understood as reviving and extending forms of action to be found in earlier social movements (Melucci 1989:214). Melucci agrees, and himself talks not of the disappearance or irrelevance of trade unionism but precisely about the manner in which it is being today articulated with the NSMs.

The above is of very considerable import, and for several reasons. Firstly, of course, it establishes or re-establishes a connection with the labour movement that some NSM theorists might like to forget or deny. Secondly, it suggests that an additional crucial aspect of the new social movements is the new understanding of social movements. The new understanding enables us to look at the old labour movement in new ways. Leninism, it now appears, is not so much out-dated as originally one-dimensional. The one-dimensionality comes out of Lenin's political - not to say instrumental - view of unions. They were means to higher ends, a foundation for a structure built in his mind, 'transmission belts' to and from the Party, 'schools of Communism' (Lenin 1970, 1976). The new approach would enable us to view trade unions as social: i.e. either prior to, or beyond, or more than, but in any case distinct from, the political. (We will later see that they can also be seen as cultural phenomena). Thirdly, however, we need to recognise that even if the classical labour movement - and its contemporary expressions - do have the four 'new' characteristics, they were not usually aware of this. Whilst, for example, the 19th and early 20th century labour movement was intensely involved in highly original and specific forms of what I would call 'alternative international communication', this was not something it ever reflected on. Such communication would have been seen primarily as a practical instrument for other ends. It is only with the development of the 'information phase of capitalism' that it becomes possible

to conceive of a 'mode of information' (Poster 1990), and to use this as a tool to theoretically examine the historical roots, inovations and limitations of traditional international labour communication.

2.6. The internationalist connection

The old labour, socialist and thirdworldist internationalisms are today so many empty shells – a series of ideologically-defined, institutionalised and competing internationalisms of politicians and bureaucrats having little contact with workers or peoples.

The NSMs are increasingly popular and democratic in so far as they are opposed to militarism, bureaucracy and technocracy – to the concentration of power and information in the hands of ever smaller numbers of managers, specialists and officials. In so far, again, as an increasing concentration of ever-greater powers is recognised to be a universal phenomenon, the new social movements tend to be globally aware and internationalist. They have, indeed, been largely called into being by the increasing 'statification' and 'inter-statification' (IMF, EEC, UN, Interpol, ILO) of society.

We can, thus, also identify the outlines of a new kind of labour internationalism. This is of the grassroots, shopfloor, community kind revealed by the British miners' strike of 1984–5. The new labour internationalism is, significantly, frequently interwoven with the internationalism of the new social movements. If labour was most internationalist when, in the past, it was most closely articulated with popular-democratic struggles, it is becoming once again internationalist where and in so far as it re-articulates itself with these.

Internationalist thinking is being increasingly called for by the 'democratic revolution' taking place throughout the Third and Communist Worlds: these are transformatory socio-political movements in which labour sometimes (not always) plays a significant role. Out of such movements in the Third World are coming both reflections on and projects for a new Third World labour internationalism (Waterman 1990a), or on a new worker internationalism more generally (South African Labour Bulletin 1991). And advanced union thinking in the West on the future of the (ex-)Communist World is increasingly seeing it as part of one world of democratic labour struggle.

2.7. New social movements and political parties

We need to have an understanding of how new social movements relate to political parties – particularly those populist or Communist ones ones that claim a vanguard role over other social forces, or have the state power to impose such. We can first ask how the relationship between social movements and political parties is now perceived. Manuel Castells (1983:299) challenges the primacy traditionally accorded the political party, suggesting that the crucial phenomena today are 'self-conscious, self-organised social movements'. Castells allows the necessity for political parties, suggesting that social movements are there precisely to move people, and parties precisely to negotiate and institutionalise the changes demanded or won. There is here no disparagement of the party form, simply a denial of its primacy, or its monopolisation of political space. If we accept this more modest role for the political party, then what of its traditional leading role (social democratic, communist, populist)? What kind of party is needed by the new social movements? Tilman Evers (1985:66) suggests these would need to rather be 'rearguard' parties – i.e. parties that would serve and support rather than leading and dominating the social movements.

In our increasingly diverse, complex but interdependent economies, polities and cultures, it would seem, it is not unity but diversity that is strength. It is, in other words, not so much a matter of trying to 'raise' (actually reduce) all the increasing variety to one 'primary', 'fundamental' contradiction (class, nationality or – for that matter – gender). It is rather one of recognising within the many movements (which thus include the labour one) the common democratic thread. And then finding a solidaristic and egalitarian way of weaving these into each other. Feminist theorising/strategising on the 'standpoint' theory of knowledge (Harding 1991), on identity, alliance, leader-member relations within movements and organisations, provides labour movements with essential pointers here (Alperin 1990, Pheterson 1990).

2.8. The primacy of democracy

It should not need new social movement theory to convince us that democracy must precede and underlie socialism. It was the original understanding of Marx and Lenin also. (It is, I believe, what actually inspired the two-stage theories, now largely discredited because the language subordinated democracy to class, treated bourgeois democracy as mystification and manipulation, and then created a socialism in which democracy was not so much

mystified and manipulated as hollowed out). The point is made by Stanley Aronowitz (1989:57), who refers not only to the experience of the Third World but also to that of the industrialised capitalist and state socialist ones.

Prioritising democracy has, in Aronowitz' argument, interesting implications for the relationship between intellectuals and workers. It is no longer a matter of the intellectuals bringing the necessary consciousness to the workers. Workers today are educated enough to determine their own interests. The intellectuals (today, anyway, a vast and varied category) can now relate to workers' and peasants' movements in two ways, 1) as 'technical intellectuals', assisting and advising movements, 2) as participants in middle-class organisations with which the unions can ally (59). If the above suggests a more egalitarian relationship between intellectuals and workers, Aronowitz also suggests a transformation in the role of the trade unions themselves:

> [T]he new social movements are self-produced, not only with regard to their appearance on the historical stage...but also with respect to their ideology, which is not merely 'trade unionist' in content but clearly radical democratic. Here the term radical entails a conception of democracy that goes beyond the parliamentary forms, even as it embraces the notion of representative government. More to the point, the social movements are (unevenly) internationalist and communitarian. They speak for their own local aspirations, against the power of the multinationals that control their labour power, and also against the national state that increasingly speaks for itself, as well as a segment of local capital. (59)

There is one more element in Aronowitz' argument, which reinforces my earlier criticism of the traditional instrumentalisation of the unions:

> Only the most myopic observer can regard Solidarity or the South African Union of Mineworkers [sic] as traditional trade unions. Like the Sao Paolo metalworkers, they are characterised by a whole network of cultural affinities. The union is not primarily an instrumental organisation; it is the name given to their communities...In the new movements, the union is the repository of the broad social vision; it is linked to the neighbourhoods, as well as to the workplace. In short, it is a cultural as well as an economic form. (61)

In this conceptualisation, therefore, the surpassing of the capitalist division of social spheres (economic, political, cultural, etc) is not simply a matter of external alliances but of internal self-transformation.

It is irrelevant if Aronowitz has overstated his case, or presented a potentiality as a reality. What is important is the recognition of such a potentiality. This can then be formulated and shown to workers to see if it responds to their experience or aspirations. And, since we are talking of radical democracy, it is evident that such an offering is not presented to the workers as 'scientific theory' or their 'real consciousness' but, precisely, as an offer – and from an explicit standpoint.

2.9. Democratisation within work: liberation from work

Struggles against authoritarianism within the wage-labour situation are traditional to the labour movement, expressed in terms of 'workers' control', 'workers' self-management' or 'workers' participation'. Recent writing here, however, is taking it beyond the traditional framework by recognising the crisis of socialist strategies, by taking an international perspective (including, for example, African experiences and South African union policy), or by making connections between labour demands and those of the NSMs (see Bayat 1991, and the review article of Webster 1991). The work of Bayat is exceptional not only in its historical and international scope, or its reference to the new technology, but in its address to democracy more generally, its awareness of the new social issues and movements, and its response to a range of contemporary literature on alternative social models. His conclusion on the possibilities existing under non-authoritarian capitalist conditions in the Third World are that control may take at least four forms: 1) 'natural' workers' control in the petty-commodity sector; 2) the democratisation of cooperatives; 3) state-sponsored forms resulting from worker pressure (Malta); 4) union attempts to influence enterprise management and national development policy (tropical Africa), efforts of plant-level unions to counter employers' attacks resulting from changing industrial structures (India) (172). His general conclusion on prospects for the Third World is that:

> Whatever the strategy of industrialisation, one must be aware that workers'
> control and a redivision of labour are not merely a technical matter. Nor are
> they limited simply to the industrial labour process. The strategy must go

beyond the workplace to encompass the class, gender and racial and other divisions in society at large...Not only must governments not suppress the movements for the democratisation of work, they must instead support them. [But] To facilitate workers' control, the very structure of the polity in a Third World country must be democratic, so that it objectively allows and accomodates a democratic redivision of labour. (206)

The struggle within work has to be combined with liberation from it. Andre Gorz (1989) has produced a challenging critique of the ideology of work that dominates the international trade-union movement as much as it does the capitalist (or statist) media. This ideology holds that 1) the more each works, the better off all will be; 2) that those who do little or no work are acting against the interests of the community; 3) that those who work hard achieve success and those who don't have only themselves to blame. He points out that today the connection between more and better has been broken and that the problem now is one of producing differently, producing other things, even working less. Gorz distinguishes between work for economic ends (the definition of work under capitalism/statism), domestic labour, work for 'oneself' (primarily the additional task of women), and autonomous activity (artistic, relational, educational, mutual-aid, etc). He argues for a movement from the first type to the third, and for the second one to be increasingly articulated with the third rather than subordinated to the first.

Gorz points out that, with the new technologies, it will be possible within a few years, in the industrialised capitalist countries, to reduce average working hours from 1,600 to 1,000 a year without a fall in living standards. Under capitalist conditions, of course, what is likely to happen is a division of the active population into 25 percent of skilled, permanent and unionised workers, 25 percent insecure and unskilled peripheral workers, and 50 percent semi-unemployed, unemployed or marginalised workers, doing occasional or seasonal work. If the trade unions are not to be reduced to some kind of neo-corporatist mutual-protection agency for the skilled and privileged, they will, Gorz argues, have to struggle for liberation from, as well as liberation in, work:

> The liberation from work for economic ends, through reductions in working hours and the development of other types of activities, self-regulated and self-determined by the individuals involved, is the only way to give positive meaning to the savings in wage labour brought about by the current

technological revolution. The project for a society of liberated time, in which everyone will be able to work but will work less and less for economic ends, is the possible meaning of the current historical developments. Such a project is able to give cohesion and a unifying perspective to the different elements that make up the social movement since 1) it is a logical extension of the experience and struggles of workers in the past; 2) it reaches beyond that experience and those struggles towards objectives which correspond to the interests of both workers and non-workers, and is thus able to cement bonds of solidarity and common political will between them; 3) it corresponds to the aspirations of the ever-growing proportion of men and women who wish to (re)gain control in and of their own lives. (224. Original stress)

In case it should be thought that struggle against wage labour is the privilege only of 'labour aristocrats' in industrialised capitalist welfare states, it should be pointed out that it is with the struggle for the eight-hour working day that the international trade-union movement was born in the 1890s, and that similar national or international strategies have been proposed within Latin America (Sulmont 1988) and the USA (Brecher and Costello 1990a,b).

The importance of Gorz' argument lies precisely in its rooting within international labour movement history and contemporary union concerns, and the explicit connections made with the the new social movements – or, if you like, with those interests and identities of workers that unions currently ignore or repress.

2.10. The option for radical engagement

Space/time compression here means this is not the place to consider the mutual consistency of these diverse pieces of theorising. It is sufficient if they at least suggest the breadth and depth of contemporary intellectual and moral resources for those concerned with the critique of contemporary unionism and the development of alternative strategies. My present feeling is that the writings are informed by a similar sensibility. In the language of Giddens (1990:136), this is not the 'sustained optimism' of the Enlightenment, that science and expertise (Marxism and the Party?) will provide social and technical solutions to all past, present and future problems. It is, rather, that of 'radical engagement' (137). Those taking this attitude hold that

although we are beset by major problems, we can and should mobilise either to reduce their impact or to transcend them. This is an optimistic outlook, but one bound up with contestatory action rather than a faith in rational analysis and discussion. Its prime vehicle is the social movement. (ibid)

3. A preliminary definition

What has been said above may suggest the distinction between the traditional Leninist concept of political unionism and the new one of SMU. Let me now try to translate some of the suggestions or implications into a series of propositions with direct reference to unions. By SMU I mean that which is:

1. Struggling within and around waged work, not simply for better wages and conditions but for increased worker and union control over the labour process, investments, new technology, relocation, subcontracting, training and education policies. Such strategies and struggles should be carried out in dialogue and common action with affected communities and interests so as to avoid conflicts (e.g. with environmentalists, with women) and to positively increase the appeal of the demands;

2. Struggling against hierarchical, authoritarian and technocratic working methods and relations, for socially-useful products, for a reduction in the hours of work, for the distribution of that which is available and necessary, for the sharing of domestic work, and for an increase in time for non-economic activity for cultural self-development and self-realisation;

3. Intimately articulated with the movements of other non-unionised or non-unionisable working classes or categories (petty-commodity sector, homeworkers, peasants, housewives, technicians and professionals);

4. Intimately articulated with other non- or multi-class democratic movements (base movements of churches, women's, residents', ecological, human-rights and peace movements, etc);

5.   Working for the continuing transformation of all social relationships and structures ('economic', 'political', 'social', 'residential', 'domestic', 'sexual') in a democratic and cooperative direction;

6.   Intimately articulated with political forces (parties, fronts and states) with similar orientations (i.e. which recognise the value of a plurality of autonomous social forces in a transformatory project);

7.   Intimately articulated with other (potential) allies as an autonomous, equal and democratic partner, neither claiming to be, nor subordinating itself to, a 'vanguard' or 'sovereign' organisation or power;

8.   Taking up the new social issues within society at large, as they arise for workers specifically and as they express themselves within the union itself (struggle against authoritarianism, bureaucracy, sexism, racism, etc.);

9.   Favouring shopfloor democracy and encouraging direct horizontal relations both between workers and between the workers and other popular/democratic social forces;

10.   Favouring direct shopfloor, grassroots and community contacts and solidarity internationally, both with workers and other popular or democratic forces, regardless of social system, ideology or political identity.

This specification has its own limitations. It may suggest that any union or worker movement has to fulfil the Ten Conditions before it can join this Post-Communist International. It does not spell out the meaning of 'intimately articulated'. Those who – like myself – find it thought-provoking but inadequate should consider themselves invited to develop it further.

4. Value of the concept

The new concept – such as it is – has itself been drawn from new social movements and new trade-union experiences, both of which have taken shape over the last 10 or 15 years. Such movements, it is true, have taken most dramatic form in the context of semi-

industrialised authoritarian countries – with Poland and South Africa as leading examples. But not all dramatic worker movements under such conditions <u>necessarily</u> give rise to SMU. Vanguardist or reformist political parties (locally based or foreign sponsored) may dominate the political scene and shape the new worker movements in traditional ways. In Spain, the radical potential of the Workers' Commissions created in the struggle against Franco has been absorbed by social democracy. In the Philippines, the militant union movement, the KMU, still hews implicitly to the Leninist model. Nor is any new experience guaranteed of permanence. In the case of Poland, people were talking as long ago as 1988-9 of 'the obsolescence of Solidarity' (Staniszkis 1989). In Brazil, a dynamic new labour movement (union, party, grassroots organisations and Christian base communities) combines promising new with depressingly old characteristics, and is faced with tremendous pressures and temptations (Sader and Silverstein 1991.

Whatever the case here, we need to further note that the development of SMU is not <u>necessarily</u> confined to the semi-industrialised authoritarian countries. It can also – apparently and significantly – be a product of the struggle against de-industrialisation and anti-democratic developments under highly-industrialised liberal-democratic conditions! The authors of a collection on the topic in the USA identify the revival of the US labour movement in terms of labour-community alliances that escape the bounds of collective bargaining activity and the hierarchical national union structures (Brecher and Costello 1990c, critically reviewed in Scipes Forthcoming). A prime case would be the campaign to prevent the shutdown of the Van Nuys (California) plant of General Motors. This not only involved a labour-community alliance but alliance with ethnic minorities, struggles to democratise the union concerned, a democratic (rather than liberal or social-reformist) attitude toward US industrial development, and a movement open to progressive political/ideological tendencies across a wide range.

It is gratifying to note that the process identified in the USA has been accompanied by a quite dramatic development of local-level labour internationalism (Brecher and Costello 1991, Karmel 1990, Witt 1990). In other cases we can see the combination of broad union thinking with new kinds of international contact. Thus, at a workshop set up by the West German Greens in 1989, technical specialists from a major German union consulted with Soviet peace organisation officials on problems of conversion from arms production. The Germans were here making explicit use of the notion of 'socially-useful production'. This concept – which obviously goes beyond the traditional parameters of either social-democratic

or Leninist unionism – came out of worker struggles against closedown threats at Lucas Aerospace in Britain in the 1970s. Such developments do not, again, mean that unionism in either the old capitalist West or the new capitalist East is <u>likely</u> to take this form. But it may be that the choice between preservation of an ineffective free-collective-bargaining unionism, neo-corporatism and a movement-oriented unionism will raise itself more dramatically than in the past.

If we do, in any case, find moments or elements of a new kind of unionism in the West and East as well as the South, and if we can also perceive seeds of a new kind of labour internationalism in relationship to this, further work on the conceptualisation of both might assist development in a new and exciting direction. We should not try to force all contemporary trade-union reality into our new model. But we should at least see whether the model does not have some reality. And if we (and ordinary workers and union members) find it an attractive one, we could then try, experimentally, to advance it further.

5. A test case: feminist strategy and union practice

Let us briefly consider the relevance of the new concept by taking a particular case. This <u>should</u> be done by using the ten criteria above and applying them to a movement, such as Solidarnosc during its dynamic period in Poland, or the KMU in the Philippines. But this would again involve time and space which I do not have at my disposal. I propose instead to consider the relationship between feminism and unionism in contemporary South Africa. This can be done by using both a limited (and even dated) conceptualisation of a feminist labour strategy and a limited case study. The conceptualisation will be borrowed from a group of Indian researchers/activists, reflecting on a survey of working women in Bombay and Kanpur (Rohini [Hensman], Gothoskar and Chaturvedi 1982; for more recent relevant reflections on India see Hensman 1991, Gandhi 1991, and, for Peru, Olea 1991). The case study is that of developments within the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) around 1988-9. Once again, others are invited to carry out their own related conceptual, analytical or historical exercises (as attempted by Scipes 1991 for the KMU, Chhachhi and Pittin 1991 for South Africa, Sader and Silverstein 1991 for Brazil).

5.1. A feminist strategy for working women

South Africa, of course, is hardly a typical Third World country (if such a thing can be imagined to exist). If, however, the Indian strategy 'travels', it might at least suggest that contemporary feminism has some general significance to workers and unions worldwide. I will draw from the summary conclusion to the Indian study, expanding where necessary. The authors propose four types of organisation or movement for working women, as follows.

1. Autonomous women's organisations and movements. Although called 'women's' organisations, these would seem to actually be feminist ones, or at least to be inspired by feminism. They are intended to take up issues of body politics (rape, wife-beating, abortion, etc), to develop a non-sexist culture and to provide a place where women can meet and talk. The authors criticise certain shortcomings of existing women's groups, dominated as they usually are by middle-class women. They consider that the presence in these of working-class women might not only broaden their social significance but also help them overcome two limiting organisational patterns - either extreme centralism or extreme structurelessness.

2. Women's trade-union organisations. This is a matter of either women's committees or separate women's unions. They are necessary because of the domination, exploitation and humiliation of women not only within the workplace but also within the union itself. These bodies would serve to discuss and struggle for women's demands in the workplace, as well as for changes in union structures and functioning that would enable women to take a full part in their activities.

3. Women's production collectives. This proposal refers to the organisation of women on a residential community basis and is in recognition of the fact that most working-class women are non-waged wives, largely confined to the home and its surrounding area. The idea is to carry out the collective organisation of housework and childcare, to set up cooperatives, to increase the economic power of the communities, and to struggle against the sexual division of labour in the household.

4. Women's organisations within general social struggles. The purpose here, of course, is the same as that of women's groups in unions - to ensure that the women can participate and that their particular point of view or grievances are not ignored or buried. Although the

report does not specify what is meant by 'general social struggles' it apparently means struggles for political rights, against price rises, etc.

5.2. The South African case

My source for South Africa is a special section on 'Women Workers in the Unions', highlighted on the front page of the South African Labour Bulletin (Klugman 1989). This section contains reports on union activities and achievements in 1988-9, resolutions of a COSATU Women's Conference in 1988 and of its Third National Congress in 1989. It interviews women workers and leaders, and it makes some reference to community-based organisation. Klugman makes only passing reference to non-workplace organisations. This might make it seem inadequate for investigating the relevance of the feminist strategy above. I think, however, we will find the case and the coverage rich enough. (And, if the model is even richer than the case, this may provide a stimulus to further research - or action - in South Africa and elsewhere).

1. Issues and achievements at work. Over the past few years there have been a number of struggles and achievements concerning women workers in South Africa, some of a rather advanced kind - particularly for the world's last officially racist state. Thus, in one enterprise, if both husband and wife are employed, either can take parental leave for a newborn child. In other cases parents have won the right to use their own sick leave to look after a sick child. There have been struggles around equal pay for work of equal value, on promotion possibilities for women, for creche facilities and pap smears (a test for cancer of the cervix). Sexual harassment at work is still a big issue and Klugman is able to report only one case in which the union acted effectively against this.

2. Forms of women's organisation in unions. Whilst some male-dominated unions have taken women's issues up forcefully, South African women activists generally seem to feel the necessity for separate women's organisation at national and/or local levels. This is because of: 1) women's lack of confidence when confronted by men; 2) in order to take women's issues to the union and union issues to women - inside and outside the unions; 3) because men don't sufficiently press women's issues, and also 4) for discussion of sensitive issues such as sexual harassment. The 1988 Women's Conference proposed there should be women's committees in the affiliated unions, and a number have since set these up at

different levels. The 1989 National Congress passed a resolution on building up women leaders at all union levels, resolving to

> attempt to break down all practical barriers to the full participation of women
> leadership in our structures, by providing child care facilities at meetings where
> it is needed, by assisting to transport women comrades home when meetings
> end late and where it is dangerous for them to take public transport and by
> spreading the idea that housework should be shared between men and women.
> (20)

3. Against sexual harassment in unions. Whilst the above issues could be possibly interpreted as traditional women's issues, or the women's concerns of traditional unions, I think the next one can only be understood in the context of contemporary feminism. It is a matter of a resolution on sexual conduct, stating in part that

> male comrades in our organisation often get involved in relationships with
> newly recruited women members of our affiliates, and that these
> relationships are often characterised by an imbalance of power because of
> the greater political experience and organisational seniority of the male
> comrade [and] when these unequal relationships collapse, the women often
> drop out of the organisation. In other cases divisions start to develop in the
> organisation because of the broken relationship [and] the problem described
> above is one reason for the lack of consistent participation by women
> comrades in our structures. (35)

This resolution apparently gave rise to the longest and most heated debate at the Congress (Obery 1989). Although it was not passed, the resolution was referred back to the affiliated organisations for discussion, with a view to incorporaing the issue within a proposed code of conduct.

4. Organisation of women outside the union. There has been much discussion on the relative importance of union and community organisation of women. In the South African context, however, 'community' can mean 'residential community' and/or 'anti-apartheid', thus conflating two types of organisation or areas of struggle mentioned by the

Indian women. The 1989 Congress proposed to take an active role in reviving the Federation of South African Women, the traditional ANC-linked women's organisation.

5. Feminist attitudes and issues. Whilst the evidence does not bear on specific feminist organisations, it is clear that feminist issues are being raised around the above matters. This is how one of the few prominent women union leaders responded to a question about whether her life would be harder if she were married:

> If I had a husband my life would be more difficult. But my boyfriend understands. I feel I must have freedom of association at home, not strings tying me all the time. But still my union activities are a problem. Sometimes as a woman you must choose between your lover or the struggle unless you educate and conscientise your man. It is tough to find someone who is also involved in the struggle, so that the power relations between you are equal. (14)

Other new issues and attitudes are expressed in the interviews. Women say of the pap smears demand that, whilst management clinics offered them contraceptives they had not asked for, they were now demanding something they themselves wanted. Another woman pointed out that the problem of sexual relations within the unions was not specific to COSATU but a universal one.

6. The persistence of tradition. It is important to record the resistance to new thinking in the unions – by some of the women as well as the men. First we must note that much of the discussion on union versus community organising was couched in terms of traditional South African workerism/populism discourse. This debate, which sets up an opposition between workers and socialism on the one hand, anti-apartheid and nationalism on the other, is hardly one appropriate to discussion on gender discrimination. And, apparently, this 'theoretical' issue died away as the unions began to tackle the real problems. Secondly, it seems that whilst union women took the debate on sexual conduct seriously, most men found it cause for amusement. Thirdly, there was a suspicion that the new advanced agreements on parental rights and responsibilites would be used by men to their own advantage rather than for the purpose intended. Finally, there were women who blamed other women for the sexual misconduct of men, and a woman leader who resisted separate women workers' organisations – in traditional socialist terms:

The aim of the women's committees is not to make women into a different social group. Women are part and parcel of the working class. Our Women's Forum Committee is different from bourgeois women's liberation. We don't view men as social enemies as bourgeois women do. They fight against men – they are resentful about historical experiences they have had and they blame men. But in our case we can't blame our male comrades because they don't possess anything as such. (22)

Whilst this did not seem to have been a majority opinion among women activists, it is well to record it. It will serve to remind us, once again, that SMU is primarily a new understanding and that its achievement is a matter of struggle.

6. By way of conclusion

The case above can be – given its limited scope – no more than suggestive. However, the extent of coincidence between the proposed strategy in India and the political experience of South Africa is striking. So is the relevance of my criteria 5 and 8 above. The first of these, it may be recalled, talks about the transformation of all social relations, including those of gender. And the second talks of the necessity of taking up the new issues as they arise for the workers themselves and within their unions. The possible enrichment of unionism, the possibilities for alliances with other democratic forces and on other popular issues, seem considerable. It is also inspiring to see this occurring in South Africa where, according to the old socialist ideology, worker organisations are supposed to be confined to either getting crumbs from the capitalist table or capturing state power. And where, according to traditional South African socialist discourse they are faced with but two competing priorities, either socialism or nationalism. As the labour movement is increasingly recognising, neither socialism nor nationalism (nor, of course, capitalism) has proven capable of emancipating workers, people and peoples. Perhaps social movement unionism offers an alternative, worldwide, and continuously renewable, project.

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