

**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR'S Y2K PROBLEM:  
A DEBATE, A DISCUSSION AND A DIALOGUE  
(A Contribution to the ILO/ICFTU Conference  
on Organised Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century)**

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November 1999

Working Paper 306

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ISSN 0921-0210

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper argues for the reinvention of the international labour movement in order to confront our globalised networked capitalist order. It reviews a wide range of recent literature. It also considers the following two overlapping dialogues. The first is The Conference on Organised Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century co-sponsored by the International Labour Organisation and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (here jointly considered as part of the crisis of labour internationally). Whilst the defensive value of such existing international organisations/institutions is allowed for, it is argued that the network provides the principle of movement for labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; 2) The second type of dialogue is taking place in precisely such networks (or network-based events) as are currently addressing themselves to labour and globalisation. It is here suggested that whilst these may be more politically appropriate as a site of international labour movement debate, they have their own limitations.



## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION: 'GENEVA, WE HAVE A PROBLEM'.....	1
2. ASHES, DIAMONDS AND ACTUALLY-EXISTING INTERNATIONALISM.....	3
3. THE SECOND COMING OF INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING....	9
4. THE PERIPHERY STRIKES FORWARD.....	12
5. THE CROSS-BORDER, CROSS-MOVEMENT, NORTH-SOUTH ALLIANCE.....	17
6. PLACE, SPACE-DISCIPLINE AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM.....	19
7. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR HISTORY: BACK TO THE FUTURE?.....	23
8. UNIONS AND CYBERSPACE: USE AND VALUE.....	30
9. LABOUR AND GLOBALISATION: THE DIALOGUE OF WHICH MILLENNIUM? .....	36
THE THEORETICAL/IDEOLOGICAL PARAMETER: ASSUMING THAT WHICH REQUIRES QUESTIONING?.....	38
THE INSTITUTIONAL PARAMETER: THE IDEOLOGIES OF THE STRUCTURES.....	41
THE COMPUTER/COMMUNICATIONAL PARAMETER: NO PARAMETERS?.....	47
10. LABOUR AND GLOBALISATION: WHICH DIALOGUE OF THE MILLENNIUM? .....	50
11. CONCLUSION: NOT SO MUCH IN AND AGAINST AS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE.....	56
REFERENCES .....	57

## 1. INTRODUCTION: 'GENEVA, WE HAVE A PROBLEM'<sup>1</sup>

Launched into space by the inter-nationalisation (sic) and inter-nationalism (sic) of the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, both international labour and international labour relations find themselves in a condition not dissimilar to that of the Soviet/Russian international spaceship *Mir*. They send desperate, complaining or demanding messages back to Geneva and Brussels, where can be found the headquarters of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and other international trade union organisations. Headquarters, unfortunately, seem to be as much afflicted by the Y2K problem as the spaceship itself. Now Y2K refers to the incapacity of many computerised devices to deal with any year beyond 2,000. Our destructive bug is that of a globalised and informatised capitalism. Our question must be whether either our spaceships or headquarters can be patched up, or supplied with the requisite new chip. Or whether they need to be re-invented on the basis of new knowledge, understandings and values.

Fortunately, for our increasingly earthbound space programme, there has recently been a quite dramatic increase in attention to the problems of labour internationally and even to labour internationalism.<sup>2</sup> This has obviously been stimulated by the impact of neoliberal globalisation and provoked by a frankly pro-capitalist and managerial celebration of the global market. Amongst writers on the Left it has also evidently been provoked by the Leftist - or Leftish - dismissal of work as providing a significant collective social identity, and the labour movement as having any such universal mission or emancipatory capacity as was once claimed for it. If the initial response to the capitalist, state and ideological assault on labour was a massive and general disorientation, this new wave of both political and academic writing suggests not only recovery but re-assertion.

What has so far been missing is an international labour movement dialogue on this. Yet, unless one believes that the truth is or can be the possession of one privileged

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<sup>1</sup> In the course of discussing a forthcoming co-edited special issue of her journal on labour internationalism, Jane Wills, Editor of *Antipode*, provided me with both a stimulus to and resources for this paper. Thanks, further, to the regrettably anonymous evaluator for this ISS Working Paper. I have tried to avoid excessive self-reference: interested readers can track down other sources of information or ideas on the Global Solidarity Website at <http://www.antenna.nl/~waterman/>.

<sup>2</sup> See Hyman 1999b, Martín 1998, Waterman 1999, for reviews of a total of 20 plus items, with 50 plus references, and only marginal overlap. For a view of labour and globalisation close to my own but which is somewhat wider theoretically and rather more positive about the traditional international labour organisations, see that of Ronaldo Munck (1998).

party, organisation, theory or ideology, such a dialogue is the only way of re-creating or even re-inventing a labour movement appropriate to new hard times which are also complex ones. A dialogue is more than either a debate or a discussion. Whilst debate suggests polemic and victory, and discussion a mutual willingness to listen, a dialogue suggests a process of mutual learning. The necessity for such a dialogue around the future of the labour movement, it seems to me, comes out of the crisis or impotence of the major labour movement traditions, whether theoretical or ideological. What this all means is that simple oppositions (within the Left) of Reformists and Revolutionaries, or (amongst the Revolutionaries) of the True and the False, become increasingly empty, irrelevant and demobilising. As we will see, thanks to globalisation, the technical and political necessity and possibility for such a dialogue now exist.

Amongst two major pro-labour traditions dominating the revival of labour studies at the present juncture I highlight those of political economy (PE) and Institutionalism. A third tradition, to which I will not here give much importance, is the Developmentalist/Dependency one (which itself developed as the promise/threat of social or socialist revolution moved from the unstable capitalist core to the unstable capitalist periphery). My categories cut across the traditional ideological or academic ones. Rooted, however, as these too are, in the disappearing past of national-industrial-colonial capitalism, we need to consider whether they are adequate to an understanding of our New World Disorder. I am, however, less concerned to deny the possible value of one or all, than to try to identify what is of value amongst them, and to also look for new approaches that might extend or surpass the currently dominant ones.

The paper addresses itself to the two problems arising: the necessity to go beyond PE and Institutionalism, and the necessity for a meaningfully global dialogue - global in the sense of both worldwide and holistic. I will begin with work in the PE and Institutionalist traditions, then move to a broader literature. I will end with a discussion of two appropriately new phenomena. The first is the implications of computerised communication for the labour movement. The second is the attempt at a global discussion on labour globally. As such, this paper itself attempts to make the move from debate to dialogue. Readers will certainly inform me of any shortcomings here.



## 2. ASHES, DIAMONDS AND ACTUALLY-EXISTING INTERNATIONALISM

An explicit political-economic and implicit state-national discourse dominates the revival of Left labour studies in the epoch of globalisation. And not only in the US or Anglo-Saxon world, where many of these writings originate, since the collective works include studies on or from other parts other of the world, as well as on the international arena. The keywords in the Left PE lexicon are: capital, labour, industry, class, imperialism, nation, state, revolution. Customarily these are presented in pairs of binary opposites: capital/labour, capitalism/socialism, imperialism/nationalism, state/people, reform/revolution, and even industry/agriculture. Customarily, they are posed on a hierarchical plane, as inferior and superior, vicious and virtuous, past and future. The Left PE view is consistent with the Marxist notion that space is passive and time active, that time conquers space: it is capitalist speed and dynamism that will free 'peoples without history' from the 'idiocy of rural life'. And, again consistent with Marx, the workers will first have to settle affairs with their - *their?*- national capitalist classes before liberating everyone everywhere. It is not that the new PE work is necessarily blind to gender, ethnicity, community and culture. But that it gives these only a particular weight against the great universals: workers will have to first settle their (national?) gender, ethnic, communal and cultural differences and divisions before they can, after clearing the battlefield of particularisms, liberate themselves - and everyone else - in a Final Struggle of Universal Classes.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of the Meiksins Wood, Meiksins and Yates (1998) collection, if we are to be guided by the EMW introduction, is to reassert such traditional Marxist verities in the face of 'globalisation', and various right and Left theories that seem to her to deny the revolutionary potential of the working class and international revolutionary socialism. I welcome the effort. It marks the US-based *Monthly Review's* rediscovery of labour as a significant force for emancipation. This work takes a clear position on labour under globalisation, which differs clearly from the convictions of both myself and others about the matter, and therefore makes possible dialogue about such on the Left.

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<sup>3</sup> In view of my criticism of a Left PE caricature of others immediately below, it would be fair to ask whether I am not here caricaturing Left PE. In the course of a critique of New Social Movement theory, Barker and Dale (1999) present a nuanced Trotskyist theorisation and analysis of waves of working-class struggle in the 1980s-90s. This not only surpasses my stereotype but also supports my own conviction about the continued pertinence of class and the re-emergence of labour struggles. They continue, however, to consider class as the great explainer and class struggle as the great solution (they also fail to confront informatisation and new forms of organisation of work). Martín (1998), however, in a classical Trotskyist leftier-than-thou polemic on labour internationalism, illustrates the caricature perfectly.

Possible but not necessary. A dialogue, additional to earlier-mentioned characteristics, would seem to require recognition of, or a recognisable representation of, the position of the other party/ies.<sup>4</sup> Yet, I feel, a significant pro-labour position (to which I will have to return) is caricatured in the following quotation:

[T]here is a kind of abstract internationalism without material foundations. It is one thing to recognise the importance of international solidarity and co-operation among national labour movements. That kind of internationalism is not only essential to socialist values but strategically indispensable to the success of many domestic class struggles. But some of the left invoke an 'international civil society', as the new arena of struggle, or 'global citizenship' as the basis of a new solidarity - and that sounds less like an anti-capitalist strategy than like a kind of whistling in the dark. When people say that the international arena is the *only* one for socialists, that global capital can *only* be met with a truly global response, they seem to be saying...that the struggle against capitalism is effectively over. (Ellen Meiksins Wood 1998:10)

The collection is divided into sections on: theories of labour and class in a changing world; the American scene; and the foreign-cum-international one. Whilst the intention of the introduction is clearly to recognise, specify and promote a new wave of labour militancy, it is also, apparently, to show how this can be done within a traditional Marxist-Leninist framework and vocabulary. It is the 19<sup>th</sup> century *weltanschauung* and the vocabulary mentioned above, that explains why globalisation is here held within distancing quotes. And also why internationalism itself is presented primarily as a relationship between national working classes/movements, themselves addressing nation states.

At the same time, however, there are chapters devoted to the relation of class to gender and ethnicity and even of the industrial/urban to the agricultural/rural. There are also the more specialised chapters, focusing on organising the unorganised, on labour education, on current union or socialist leaderships (US, the ex-Communist world, the European Union, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions). And there is even one chapter, on class-community-internationalist unionism in Los Angeles, which seems to burst out of the dominant discourse and debouch onto something different.

The editors are wise in putting a question mark at the end of their main title. The overwhelming impression from the collection is that, with the exception of certain movements in East Asia and Mexico, the labour movement in the age of globalisation is still marked more by ashes than diamonds. National trade union and Left strategies in the US,

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<sup>4</sup> Or forerunners. There is a 10-15 year-old US tradition of writing about international labour of which *Monthly Review* may be unaware. A good recent example would be Labour Research Review (1995).

the ex-Communist world, the European Union, and at international level, may be changing but are apparently all marked by profound ambiguities, limitations and compromises. Thus, Gerard Greenfield's rare and welcome chapter on the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which won the trade union Cold War and is now the unchallenged leader of international unionism, reveals that the very premise of all its meagre activity in East and South-East Asia is neither 'organise' nor 'agitate', far less 'mobilise', but *compromise*.<sup>5</sup> And this compromise is not with the turbulent working people of the region but with any and every national or interstate agency with which it might, hypothetically, be able to bargain around a table. The Mexican case study, which prioritises urban proletarian leadership, is actually about labour's *response* to a rural movement. But it here reproduces the Latin American Left tradition of reducing what is actually an *indigenous* movement to a PE category, something achieved politically only at a cost in blood to both the indigenous and the Left (Peru, Guatemala). The Zapatista leadership of this particular indigenous uprising, is concerned not simply with local land and cultural rights, but national democracy - and addresses itself to the global civil society Ellen Meiksins Wood dismisses as lacking a material base.

Other contributors also seem to be rooting amongst the national/industrial ashes in an attempt to find some glowing embers. How else are we to understand Peter Gilmore's piece on Communists and workers in the ex-Communist world? This is an informative but depressing piece. It says that large parts of the population 'have remained strongly attached to socialist values' (162) - presumably of a late-C19th or early-C20th mark. It appears that the party-political bearers of such are divided into Western-type Social Democrats, anti-Western and nationalist authoritarians, and broad-church Socialist Democrats favouring a large state sector and state planning. Whilst Gilmore apparently identifies with this last socialism, rather than the more pro-Western or proto-fascist one, he does not tell us where even this might stand on women, ecology, militarism, ethnic minorities or public transport. Nor on internationalism, traditional or new, material or immaterial. I would have thought that it would be a socialism with *such* concerns on its banners that might best articulate (join and express) the broadest range of worker and popular suffering and discontent there - as well as to bring it the maximum of solidarity from and with the

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<sup>5</sup> Greenfield provides a powerful corrective to the informative but rosy-coloured view of the ICFTU as 'contesting globalisation' by Robert O'Brien (1996).

West and South.<sup>6</sup>

Co-Editor, Peter Meiksins, confronts Left theorising about difference and differentiation in the contemporary working class by arguing that 'the old labour movement may have more to teach us than we acknowledge' (34) about these. Indeed. But what? There has *got* to be more to be learned about national or international labour history, and its lessons for us, than that contemporary labour requires a 'real "class" project' (36). As in Russia, 1917? 'History' also tells us, for example, that labour once was *the* citizen movement, *the* social movement, i.e. that it addressed society as a whole and not just the working class (Johnston 1999).

The major diamond amongst the ashes is Eric Mann's Bus Riders Union/Sindicato de Pasajeros in Los Angeles. This is more than a case study: the organisation is a product of the author's own Labour/Community Strategy Centre. Mann, a veteran of Marxism-Leninism and labour-community struggle, has little but criticism for union leaderships - right down to local level. His case study, however, is not of a proletarian or trade union movement at all! It is of the relationship between a revolutionary ideologist/organiser, a non-governmental organisation and a voluntary, mixed-class organisation in a multi-ethnic community of the poor. It is an urban social movement, addressing itself to the felt needs of the community for public transport! In a related case, the Strategy Centre organised a similar community confronted by toxic emissions. Because of the national/ethnic origins of these communities, it has been apparently possible to mobilise them against California's anti-immigrant laws, in solidarity with unions and the Zapatistas in Mexico and against the blockade of Cuba. This is, fortunately, not the only contribution going further than the editorial orientation. There is powerful criticism of the 'end of work' thesis (Doug Henwood). The piece on women and labour (Johanna Brenner) not only reveals the mutual

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<sup>6</sup> It is oddly reassuring to find that the sterility of old Left and labour strategies in the North is reproduced in Latin America. An article inspired by a meeting of the Socialist International in Buenos Aires makes, perhaps, the unkindest cut of all, referring to both the local and international movement as 'the inoffensive Left' (Dearriba, Rosenberg and Sabat 1999). In a study on the Left, social movements and democracy in Latin America, Kenneth Roberts (1998) both demonstrates and explains the parallel crisis of the radical and reformist Left in such different cases as those of Chile and Peru. Roberts is clear that this crisis is an outcome of neo-liberalism and globalisation, and that a possible way out is through a bottom-up strategy of popular empowerment, bringing together class and new social movements, allied to others internationally. This suggests to me that any renewal of the Left has to be both universal (world-wide) and global (supranational), with consistent principles applied North and South, nationally and globally. Such an understanding may prevent the splintering that has marked and marred traditional internationalisms, even during their periods of growth.

dependency of each movement on the other but proposes new concepts and analytical strategies.

In the light of the book's general scepticism about 'globalisation', and the literal *internationalism* urged on us by Ellen Meiksins Wood (and the Canadian union specialist and consultant, Sam Gindin) I must return to my earlier quote. EMW, a recently-appointed editor of the now venerable *Monthly Review*, has, it must be said, a rather 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of 'matter', which does not seem to include its more complex, lightweight or 20<sup>th</sup> century manifestations, such as 'ideas', 'culture', 'information' or even, possibly, 'gender'. She privileges the economic and political, and, of course, political economy. She similarly privileges the 19<sup>th</sup> century nation and state (*sans* quotes) as the unproblematised terrain and target of emancipatory struggle. And, finally, she considers the working class the privileged bearer of emancipation and internationalism. I am not sure of exactly whom her Left immaterial internationalists are, since she not only fails to allow them to speak for themselves but does not even name them. Familiar, as I am, with a wide range of Left literature on global civil society and citizenship, etc, I cannot recall anyone arguing that globalisation can *only* be combated in the international arena. In so far as she might be thinking of someone like, for example, David Held, then a quote may suggest how he relates to a globalised capitalist world:

Faced with overlapping communities of fate - with, this is, a world in which the fortunes of individual political communities are increasingly bound together - citizens in the future will need to be not only citizens of their own communities, but also of the regions in which they live, and of the wider global order. They must be able to participate in diverse political communities - from cities and sub-national regions, to nation states, regions and wider global networks. It is clear that a process of disconnecting legitimate political authority from states and fixed borders has already begun as legitimate forms of governance are diffused below, above and alongside the nation state. But the cosmopolitan project is in favour of a radical extension of this process so long as it is circumscribed by a far-reaching commitment to democratic rights and duties (Held 1998).

It would, finally, seem to me that whilst EMW is whistling in the gathering dusk of the industrial-national-capitalist era for a nation-state-oriented internationalism, others are doing increasingly visible damage to global patriarchy, environmental destruction, militarism, imperialism, ethno-cultural homogenisation *and neoliberal economic globalisation* (the computer-articulated campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment). And - as with the Zapatistas - with scarcely a socialist slogan to be seen (see, for an overview of the movements, Fernández Durán 1999)! Could there possibly be an inverse

relationship between national-industrial socialist truisms on the one hand and effective confrontation with globalisation on the other?

There are, of course, other traditions of political economy. Or, perhaps one should say, other political economists, unworried about whether their analyses prove Marx right. Myron Frankman, for example, who appears rather well-informed about classical political-economy (meaning one with moral and philosophical concerns) argues provocatively for a 'planet-wide citizen income', an idea which certainly stimulates the little grey cells (Frankman 1998). Another example of such, quite surprisingly, is the International Chemical, Energy and Mineworkers Federation (ICEM 1999). This is one of a group of ITSs (International Trade Secretariats) that has been gaining energy and bite over the last five years or so. It has the practice of commissioning and publishing professional and - for an international union - pathbreaking reports. Suffice it to say that this one actually straddles the distinction between the current section of this paper and the next one, not only analysing the dramatic changes taking place in the global political economy, and proposing far-reaching reforms in both the international institutions and procedures of labour relations and also of the United Nations and international financial institutions more generally. I became aware of it too late to give it the critique it really deserves, but not too late to indicate its coverage and flavour.

*Coverage.* Part 1 is on corporate power and the world social economy, covering not only the ICEM-related industries and corporations but also the transformation of the global economy, and its implications for incomes, national and international differentials, and the increasing subordination to the mega-corporations of the inter-state agencies. Part 2 is on global unionism and a new kind of solidarity. This deals in some detail with the range of arenas and strategies in which the ICEM is active. But it also discusses its present or proposed activity in public arenas internationally, in the reform of global governance and of the control of corporations. As for *flavour*, how about this?

The mega-corps are coming under increasing pressure from a wide constellation of issue-based citizens' groups. NGOs such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Third World Network, women's groups, consumer associations and many others have begun to construct a global civic society around the global corporation. Much of the territory that these groups occupy was a part of the original trade union philosophy. The 'specialisation' of these groups is a reflection in part on the fact that trade unions have allowed themselves to be restricted to workplace 'bread and butter' issues and to leave wider social questions to others. Fragmentation of this kind allows those being criticised to divide the opposition and to set one group against another.

The NGOs have begun to learn this lesson of solidarity and have begun to group together over major issues. The most impressive example of this in action was the combined assault by a wide range of social groups upon the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), which resulted in its withdrawal from the globalisation agenda – at least for the time being. Most of the international trade union movement was notably absent from the alliance – separated by its own decision to push for a set of labour protection clauses within the body of the agreement, rather than to oppose the agreement itself.

It now seems certain that this debate will be revived within the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This will give a second opportunity to forge a stronger civic alliance that this time can include the trade unions...

I look forward to seeing *Monthly Review* come to terms with arguments concerning international institutions and global civil society, but coming out of a political-economic analysis and an international trade union organisation.

### **3. THE SECOND COMING OF INTERNATIONAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING**

Breitenfellner and Ramsay, *Euros* rather than *Gringos*, are concerned to identify and further union power at the international/global level. Both papers are well informed and informative. And although both are, I think, prisoners of institutions and strategies that are *part* of the crisis of labour internationally, no one interested in surpassing this crisis can afford to miss them.<sup>7</sup>

Breitenfellner (1997), works for the Austrian Federation of Trade Unions (ÖGB) and is writing here in the journal of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). He not only favours the development of 'global unionism' but has a definite theoretical/ideological understanding of such:

Global unionism is not an end in itself, but a means of resolving problems that arise in the world economy. First, unions could be instrumental in spurring governments to cooperate with each other. Second, they may reproduce their national function at the worldwide level by instigating tripartite agreements between global labour, global business and the international community of states in order to bring global financial markets - i.e. the fourth player - under control.

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<sup>7</sup> Too late for inclusion here is the more substantial work by Leisink (1999), similarly Eurocentred and similarly concerned with establishing a global framework for the regulation of capital-labour relations. It is similar to the others also in its global neo-Keynesian orientation. An exceptional contribution to the collection is that on globalisation and Australian labour relations by Rob Lambert (1999a). This is exceptional both in seeing Chinese and Indonesian labour relations as significant for those of this (post-)industrialised nation state, and for its advocacy of some kind of international social movement unionism as a necessary inter/national strategy. Rob Lambert has been the key figure behind the Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (see further below).

This approach of course focuses on the institutional dimension of the international political economy...[W]hat is at stake ultimately is the pursuit of social justice and global security [...] Only the establishment of reliable institutions and a commitment to cooperate - two aims of global unionism - can contribute to achieving stable international relations. (532)

Breitenfellner considers in turn:

- the position of labour in the global economy,
- the limits to national sovereignty,
- the challenge these present to unionism, and
- 'the fragmentary foundations of global unionism' (543ff).

As an overview of the matter, making a wide-ranging and judicious selection of disputes, campaigns, union forms, levels, and different possible strategies, this is an admirable piece. It leans heavily in the direction of the industrially-specialised International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) as providing the key to the future. It concludes (551-3) that global unionism is a desirable element in 'restoring the socio-economic balance of power' (552). Global unionism, it argues, can draw on the tradition of labour internationalism; it can and should go beyond diplomacy, information exchange and policy coordination; it needs to develop strategies, to operate and bargain internationally; it should be based on local experience; it should use the new communications technology for contact with the base; it should see itself as part of a global civil society:

The ultimate aim of global unionism would be to institutionalise a system of tripartite social partnership for the purpose of regulating the global economy in the interest of greater equality, prosperity and stability...The real challenge of globalisation is to take advantage of the new opportunities if international solidarity is to embrace more than traditional worker anthems. (ibid)

The limitations of this truly innovatory scenario are, as I have suggested above, those of an existing institutionality. The keyword in the argument is *restoring*. There exists, in the mind of Breitenfellner (as well, no doubt, as in that of the ÖGB and the ILO) a Paradise Lost, a past in which there existed a socio-economic balance of power, which, through collective bargaining between social partners, promoted the greatest good of the greatest number. There is also, clearly, a Paradise (to be) Regained, in which a tripartite agreement between global labour, global capital and a global community of states is to tame a fourth player, the global financial markets.

There are here both lacunae and leaps. National Keynesianism was limited to certain parts of the working and popular classes, in certain countries with a dominant position



in the international hierarchy. And, whatever economic and social benefits it may have provided, it Left labour politically disarmed in the face of neoliberalism. Both national and international collective bargaining are bi- or tripartite, yet Breitenfellner slips in a fourth party - a *diablo ex machina tripartita*. Is financial capital, then, the unacceptable face of international capitalism? To be dealt with only as a *problem for* tripartism? To be eventually included in *quatripartite* labour relations? Or to be recognised as the most dynamic, global, destructive and intangible element *within* the third party (as argued forcefully by Castells 1996-8)? Is not the practice and ideology of tripartism itself responsible for the current disorientation of labour nationally and internationally? Can, in any case, National Keynesianism and Collective Bargaining be hoisted/foisted *globally*, or even to the restricted level of the EU? And - a less rhetorical question - does Harvie Ramsay provide some answers to our Y2K problem?

Ramsay (1998), a veteran international labour specialist, writes a briefer and more modest paper, focused precisely on the EU level of our globalising world. It is similarly institutional, examining in turn:

- Theories of international unionism,
- Prospects for international unionism in Europe, and
- Conclusions for collective bargaining at EU, European industry and MNC level.

Its particular interest for me lies in his identification of past or present theoretical/strategical approaches to international unionism: Evolutionary Optimism (the rise of MNCs will inevitably lead to countervailing power in the shape of international unionism), Managerial Scepticism (which I will leave to managerial sceptics), Left Pessimism (with which he identifies himself and his onetime colleague Nigel Haworth), National Alternatism (strong governments and IR systems can resist MNCs), and Contingency Theories (given certain circumstances, certain MNCs may favour European-level bargaining). Ramsay associates himself, cautiously, with this somewhat iffy approach.

I am puzzled about Ramsay's Left Pessimism, unless this is a Gramscian one of the intellect, ineluctably associated with Gramsci's optimism of the will. The suggestion of one of his past joint-authored pieces was that labour internationalism would have to go beyond the factory wall and union office (Haworth and Ramsay 1984). This was a move in the direction of the 'labour-community alliance' (Brecher and Costello 1990, Mann

above, Kamel and Hoffman below), and a major stimulus to my own thinking about 'the new internationalisms' and 'the new social unionism'.<sup>8</sup> Pessimism about institutions can lead one to address movements as sources of new institutions. 'Solidarity at Last?' suggests a search for its possible meanings and contemporary sources. But this is not the case with Ramsay's piece which, after another detailed consideration, here of international capital, the EU's own promotion of international bargaining, the nature and functions of international unionism, reaches its predictably iffy conclusion. This is that, despite formidable obstacles to, and contradictions within, trade union policies at EU level, unions need to do more research, to expand information exchange, become more flexible and open. Which, however, 'may also promote fresh central union efforts to retain control' (525). If, after almost 100 years, the Iron Law of Oligarchy still rules, do we not need principle of labour self-articulation which it cannot govern?

There is, of course, nothing wrong with institutional labour studies. The problem arises, at least for a critical sociology, when the institutions form the parameters of the thought. I also see nothing wrong in speculating, or even working toward, a future institutional framework appropriate to a newly recognised terrain of dispute. On the contrary. But an institutionalism that imposes old institutional conclusions on new social premises fails to recognise the historical relationship between social movement and social compromise.

Does the same limitation affect studies of labour and globalisation at the capitalist periphery, notoriously unstable and volatile, and where one might therefore assume a scepticism as to a labour institutionality imported from the customarily opposed West?

#### **4. THE PERIPHERY STRIKES FORWARD**

Here I want to look at two collections revealing the experience and views of the labour movement and the allied Left from what used to be called the Third World. This Third World is, of course, a concept that belongs to the later period of national-industrial capitalism, and of the international politics of ideological blocs. At that time there developed mass radical-nationalist movements, which were anti-imperialist and were nominally in favour of 'positive neutrality'. The radical-nationalist project tended, in practice, to op-

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<sup>8</sup> Also important to note is work on globalisation which does not begin with unions or the labour movement but which nonetheless recognises labour struggles as essential to 'the politics of resistance' (Gills Forthcoming).

erate in the political and theoretical places and spaces allowed for them by West/East rivalry. Thus, alongside, or overlapping pro-Western or pro-Communist unionism, there developed a radical-nationalist variety with its own state-supported regional internationals (at least in Africa and the Arab world). There also developed theories of development/dependency, which themselves entered the analysis of labour and unionism, and which distinguished this area from, or opposed it to, the rest of the world. The two collective works under consideration, one from Latin America and one from India can be taken as indicating the passing of that era and the beginning of what the first one calls a 'painful insertion into an uncertain world'.

Portella de Castro and Wachendorfer (1998) comes from the stable of *Nueva Sociedad*, a Caracas-based political journal and publishing house, itself partially supported by the West German, Social-Democratic, Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Whilst most Left Latin American publishing houses have abandoned any interest in labour, or internationalism, *Nueva Sociedad* continues to produce work addressed to both. This particular one considers in turn: Latin and North American responses to economic globalisation; national labour responses, including those of West German unions and the Brazilian landless movement (MST); union responses at enterprise or sectoral level; and the international reshaping of Latin-American unionism (by changes within the ICFTU regionally, the AFL-CIO, and the new international union strategy of 'social clauses').

The book as a whole ought to be translated into English as a matter of some urgency. I would have thought that it was in the interest of the Canadian and/or US unions to do so. This is because of the unique breadth and insight it provides into the Latin American - indeed hemispheric - union movement at a moment of transition. For our current purpose the most important section is obviously the last. This gives a detailed, optimistic but sober account of renovation in the international relations of trade unions in the hemisphere. There is not too much talk of 'internationalism' or 'solidarity' here, and with good reason given a half century or more of trade union imperialism from the North and trade union nationalism in the South. The latter, it should be noted, served Latin American labour as ambiguously as the former did US workers. This is because the nationalism customarily meant subordination to Left or right nationalist projects of particular parties, regimes or states. And these, in turn, divided workers and unions nationally as well as cross-nationally.

One contribution to the book reveals that, as recently as 1995, the attempt to develop a common Latin American trade union position on the 19<sup>th</sup> century-type territorial/resource conflict between Peru and Ecuador was stymied by the identification of the two unions concerned with the positions of their respective states. (The matter was, I recall, eventually solved, over the heads of their respective unions and civil societies, by the Presidents - much to the chagrin of a previously silent, now enraged Peruvian Left). This particular contribution, by Kjeld Aagaard Jakobsen (1998), on the ICFTU's regional organisation, is something of an eye-opener. The Inter-American Regional Organisation of Workers, universally known by its Spanish initials as the ORIT, was, during the Cold War, a byword for US corruption, covert operations, the splitting and domination of Third World unions. The AFL-CIO used it at will, conjointly or alternatively to the ICFTU itself and its very own, but state-funded and CIA-linked, American Institute for Free Labour Development. Perhaps it is a combination of the hyper-irrelevance of the ORIT, the savage effects of neo-liberalism on labour in the sub-continent, and the failure of the Eurocentric ICFTU to respond with speed and relevance to globalisation, that has led to the ORIT playing something of a vanguard role with respect to both the continent and the ICFTU. It would have been nice if this new internationalism had reached the ORIT from the shopfloor. But given the past dependence on nation states, national parties and nationalist ideologies, any mass internationalism amongst Latin American workers has been the exception.<sup>9</sup> The ORIT has been not only democratising itself internally and reaching out to unions regardless of political or international affiliation.<sup>10</sup> It has also been playing an active role in various cross-sector, cross-border civil society alliances attempting to confront the wave of inter-state free-trade initiatives in the Americas. This, inevitably, means entering non-union networks, alliances and coalitions<sup>11</sup> - to the silent chagrin, here, of the ICFTU in Brussels. So the ORIT has been impacted from the grassroots, if not the shopfloor. Or - if one prefers to concentrate on the institutionalised expression of such - we

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<sup>9</sup> At a massive independent Left trade union Mayday demonstration I attended in Mexico City, 1999, there were several anti-*Gringo* but not one internationalist speech, slogan, sign or symbol.

<sup>10</sup> The major Peruvian union centre remains, I believe, affiliated to the Communist phantom (or ghost of Communism) I worked for, 1966-9, the World Federation of Trade Unions.

<sup>11</sup> Such as the Social Alliance of the Americas, of which other leading members are Common Frontiers (Canada), the Quebec Network on Continental Integration (RQIC), the Mexican Network Confronting Free Trade (RMALC), the Alliance for Responsible Trade (ALR, USA), the Brazilian Network for the Integration of the Poor (REBRIP), the Civil Society Initiative on Central American Integration (ICIC), and the Latin American Co-ordination of Rural Organisations (CLOC). See Alianza Social Continental (1999a,b), Kamel and Hoffman (1999:113-15).

could consider this as the horizontal impact of the NGOs in the Americas. A major question facing both the ORIT and the AFL-CIO (and the Canadian unions for that matter) must therefore be the development of a healthy, open and democratic dialectic with civil society more generally.<sup>12</sup>

A major influence on the ORIT, for good or bad, must remain the AFL-CIO. A David within the labour force and civil society of the USA, it remains a Goliath on the hemispheric scene. The chapter on the AFL-CIO, by Russell Smith (1998), is the most detailed account I have yet seen of the transformation of the international policy and institutions of this organisation. Assessments of this transformation have so far tended to be in terms of whether or not it has changed from the days of the AFL-CIO-CIA. Smith enables us to see this in more differentiated and qualitative terms. He considers personnel, financing and the AFL-CIO's own publicity in the (paradoxically non-electronic!) *America@Work*. He sees the changes as providing an opening for the Latin American movement to develop a South-North solidarity relationship of a more meaningful nature. But, again, he identifies continuing obstacles and challenges. The transformation of the AFL-CIO has definitely been a factor, additional to the previously-mentioned ones, in the revival of the ORIT.

John and Chenoy (1996) is, in some ways, an even more remarkable book, coming out of an India where, for decades, the unions and the Left - or Lefts - have combined a rhetorical internationalism, institutional or moral affiliations with different foreign national or international Left leaderships, and the practical pursuit of a variety of national and nationalist policies that isolated them even from their immediate neighbours in South Asia.<sup>13</sup> Published by one of the tiny labour resource groups created by the independent Left in the 1980s, this book addresses itself directly to the matter of 'social clauses'.

The idea of inserting a social clause into multilateral trade agreements means a requirement that imports into the North from the South depend on Southern state observance of certain labour conditions. Such clauses were initially a protectionist device, proposed

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<sup>12</sup> The ORIT, as well as certain heavy dancers amongst the Latin American national unions, has, I understand, been a problematic presence within at least one of the 'cross-sector, cross-border' conferences, fora or fronts in the hemisphere. See, for an insider's view of one or two of these events, de la Cueva (1999).

<sup>13</sup> Contrast two Indian labour movement collections on Indian labour and unions in the era of globalisation, both of which are almost totally dominated by the Left PE paradigm, neither of which makes more than a token gesture, or shows marginal awareness, of labour internationalism, and both of which are (consequently?) marked more heavily by pessimism of the intellect than optimism of the will (Shramik Pratishtan 1999, Working Class 1998).

by certain sections of capital and certain Northern states, often supported on jobs or human rights grounds by Northern unions or human rights bodies. The book claims to merely record an Indian debate. The contributions of the national union representatives lean toward a traditional Indian nationalist-protectionist position. But space is nonetheless provided for those rejecting a binary for/against logic, on the grounds that this implies identification with either a Northern or an Indian capitalist interest! Amongst those proposing the necessity for a third, independent, analysis and strategy, no single position can be identified. But we hear the voices of a whole range of thinkers and activists, from the labour, women's, ecological, children's, human rights and other such movements. What the book therefore represents is a new contribution to what is - or still needs to be - a truly international debate on the international strategy of labour in the era of globalisation. The most remarkable contribution for me is that of the Indian eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva (1996).

Shiva, who has previously tended to a simple oppositionism (feminist, third-worldist, rural, local), here presents a sophisticated and eloquent argument from the standpoint of the international solidarity. She sees social and/or environmental clauses as protectionist, unilateral (one way, and top-down internationally), ineffective, and divisive of international solidarity. The trade related labour standard

does not address the issue of restructuring of production and the dispensability of the worker. In fact, it diverts attention from the fundamental problem...The real crisis related to work in the globalisation period is that the destruction of work and livelihood is taking place at an unprecedented rate...In the context of the end of work, the real challenge is to protect work. This is a matter of public intervention in technology policy...

[...]As unilateralism is based on domination and control, it weakens Southern States and Southern citizens in evolving their own systems. Most issues and most sectors of economic policy...need to be addressed domestically through movements of civil society creating accountability of state and civil systems... (101-107)

I am not sure this is the last word on the matter, any more than we can expect last words to come from any particular person, country, region or sector. But the very presence of such voices provides some kind of guarantee against a bad old tradition under which international trade union organisations, or Left intellectuals with international reach, could create their particularistic universalism on the safe assumption that the periphery would not strike back.

Whatever, however, the old Third World might or might not contribute to labour and internationalism, we might expect even more from the place at which, to put it euphemistically, the peso meets the dollar.

## 5. THE CROSS-BORDER, CROSS-MOVEMENT, NORTH-SOUTH ALLIANCE

There is nowhere in the world where the First World meets the Third World so sharply as on the frontier/*frontera* between the USA and Mexico (I am here excluding their daily confrontation on the streets of New York, Sao Paulo or Moscow).<sup>14</sup> There is no period in which they have met so dramatically as that following the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. And there is no such front of neo-liberal confrontation as that of labour. This conflict is centred on the *maquiladora*, now the collective term for the cheap-labour assembly plants on the Northern border of Mexico.

Rachel Kamel and the American Friends Service Committee ('Friends' in the sense of Quakers) have been working in and on this geographical and industrial area for 15 or 20 years, particularly with the large numbers of women workers in the zones. This persistence provides a model that international socialists, whizzing around the world in a dizzying hunt for the Weak Link in the Capitalist Chain, might care to follow.<sup>15</sup> The Kamel and Hoffman (1999) collection of articles, interviews, documents and declarations is inspired by no explicit theoretical framework or ideological position. It is certainly informed by a ecumenical Christian ethic, thus reviving a religious universalism at the service of the poor. The collection records and reveals the situation of workers, women, unions, communities, and of the various cross-border projects and alliances that are attempting not to resist globalisation, in the name of some right- or Left-nationalist development project, but to confront it, in the name of working people on both sides.

The collection is strongest where it is recording, or analysing, the impact of neo-liberalism on the Mexican side (actually, of course, Mexicans are on both sides). About half of the book is devoted to the industries, to the position of women, to health and envi-

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<sup>14</sup> For a case in which the North/South relationship is more-or-less reversed, consider the extensive and varied relations between South African trade unions and their less-developed 'Northern' neighbours (some are within the country!), in Motau (1999) and Shopsteward (1999).

<sup>15</sup> In 1993 I met Argentinean Trotskyists, seeking this weak link in...Moscow! It appeared to me that they were less concerned with international labour solidarity in some practical and plebeian sense, more in what one might call the reimport of revolution.

ronmental issues. The other half is intended to deal with cross-border solidarity in general, with the AFSC and its Mexican counterpart in particular, and with alternatives to NAFTA in the future. Much of the space is, however, taken by further analyses of the situation. And where the book does deal with solidarity projects, it is neither comprehensive nor critical.

Two final documents reveal the extent to which what have been called 'cross-border, cross-movement' alliances (Pollack 1999) are spreading out from the *frontera* to North America in general (thus including Mexico and Canada), and from there to the whole hemisphere! Focal points here are the interstate conferences at which so-called free-trade agreements are shaped up or approved. In both Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and Santiago, Chile, in 1997, unions, pro-labour groups, and varied national or regional movements and alliances (human rights, women, ecological, rural, indigenous peoples) met together to draw up proposals for 'social alliances' alternative to those of the governments and corporations (Cumbre de los Pueblos de América 1999). Significant in both cases has been the initiating role of the Mexican network. This has been evidently energised by the frontier experience. And it is called the 'Mexican Network Confronting Free Trade'. *Network*: not, thus, union or organisation. *Confronting*: not, thus, 'collective bargaining with', nor simply 'rejecting', (though elements of both may be found within its proposals and activities). The network, and the experience, have strong labour and union roots, but seem prepared to recognise the new hemispheric/global terrain of struggle and to seek for a radically-democratic alternative to neo-liberalism (for the problems of developing such, see Bakvis 1998, Carr 1996, Pollack 1999).

Whilst this well-designed and illustrated reader, with its bibliography and resource listing, is likely to become a standard organising and teaching text, we do need critical analyses of the solidarity organisations and campaigns, which are more problematic than this book suggests (Nissen 1999). In the meantime, those concerned with alternatives to globalisation, or trying to develop solidarity in different places or at other levels, will find in it a source of both inspiration and material for reflection. One question that might arise would be: why *this* particular zone or frontier, rather than the EU zone, or the European-Other frontier? I have already given a PE answer to this. But it seems to me that if we want to understand not only why but how, and not only the advanced model but its hypothetical limitations, we are going to have find something that reaches places that traditional PE fails to do.



## 6. PLACE, SPACE-DISCIPLINE AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

The political-economy model has been seriously subverted, or at least qualified, by radical social geography, which insists that people are as much made by, and makers of, place/space as they are of work and industry. What the Herod (1998) collection is offering us is some kind of historical-geographical materialism. Whilst not necessarily disputing the previous vocabulary, it adds to it: place and space, scale, mobility, locality, globality, and geographies of industry/employment, domination, resistance and challenge. The social geographers - these social geographers - seem to have no such problem with globalisation as do the PE people. Maybe the discipline concerned with space is simply more open to the world than the one bound to time (in which, again classically, 'the more advanced countries show the more backward ones their future'). There is, of course, no guarantee that academic social geography will allow equal space and weight to gender, ethnic and other identities/determinants. It may simply be that the breach opened in the Great Wall of Nim (National Industrial Marxism) allows others to slip through alongside or after the geographers. It is nonetheless the case that this new collection will be an eye-opener for those concerned with the emancipatory potential of labour in the era of globalisation. And those concerned with emancipatory labour studies. And, in particular, for those concerned with international labour and labour internationalism, which, alongside theory, must be the focus of this comment.

There are, actually, two introductions to this largely US-oriented collection. There is a foreword by Richard Walker, which traces out, perceptively and self-critically, the itinerary of Left labour studies since the 1960s. He identifies, first, the two traditions: of labour-process studies (Harry Braverman) and cultural studies (Edward Thompson). These, he says, declined in the 1980s (confronted by the rise and rise of neo-liberalism?). Following this, he says, studies of labour shifted into the landscape (an appropriate response to the increasing mobility and scale of operation of capital?). He then identifies a split amongst the geographers into a declining political-economic tradition and a rising cultural one. Whilst far from rubbishing the radical indeterminism of postmodernism, he both recognises and wishes to further a new kind of labour studies, both within and beyond geography. This, he says:

must begin from the standpoint of the new global working class, which in its great variety of peoples and backgrounds overturns many conventional suppositions from the outset...But it must get back to being political economy; that is, it must take the logic of capitalist economies and the force of class as essential

premises...The presumption still remains that for the great mass of the world's people work is still the central fact of existence [...] What we need, in particular, is a political economy of place... [G]eographic inquiry must be telescopic, able to move up and down the scale of places...Globalism is as real as the persistence of localism, but when and where and how it matters is for us to puzzle out, not to assume. [xvi]

There is much more, in the same penetrating and provocative vein. I am myself not at all sure that we *should* prioritise a geographical-historical political economy over - say - a cultural, feminist, ecological or communicational approach to labour and emancipation. It depends, surely, on what kind of PE and what kind of Non-PE. Walker has also, surely, got to be wrong in holding E.P.Thompson (social activist, internationalist and inveterate enemy of a-social Left academic obscurantism and political posturing) responsible for post-modernism! But Walker certainly suggests the potential of a labour studies beyond the confines of Thompson's (1967) 'time, work discipline and industrial capitalism'.

Andy Herod does a similarly enlightening job when he reviews the literature on trade unions and space. He also provides thoughtful introductions to the three sections of the book, these being little review essays in their own right. Herod argues that workers are as much products - and producers - of space as they are of workplaces and industry. He considers in turn how different labour laws or regulations affect the spatial structure of unionism, how unionism is affected by the economic geography of capitalism, how union organising responds to place, how it is affected by particularities of place and context. A seven-page bibliography suggests the extent of this new tradition - to which classical political economy, or institutional studies of unionism, have made little reference. We should, however, note a shift of focus from labour (Walker) to unionism (Herod). There is here a significant slippage, in so far as the trade union, as we know it, is a product of and response to industrial and national (or colonial) capitalism, whereas the book itself is informed by an understanding of globalisation and the kind of global labour force mentioned by Walker. Thus, Herod himself remarks on the extension of union organising from a national to an international scale, and even from space to cyberspace (21-2). But no *case* is made for focussing on an institution of labour representation indelibly marked by the parameters of company, industry, product, market, locale and skill, as laid down in a now-passing period of industrial capitalist/statist development.

The limits of the self-restriction are revealed in the international section of the collection, which is, significantly for the era of globalisation, also the first one. The studies

here of the International Metalworkers Federation in Eastern Europe, of Mexican and Japanese unionism, all raise major questions in this reader's mind about the union *form* of labour self-organisation. Herod himself reveals the IMWF (my W distinguishes it from another body involved in global space-production) trying to check the capitalist (under)development of the ex-Communist world. This is clearly seen as threatening its traditional space of operation, and such shaky rights and privileges as might have been left over from national Keynesianism in the West. One cannot deny the possible combination of universalist/solidarity motives with particularist/protectionist ones amongst IMWF officers. But researchers are surely required to ask, and not only rhetorically (as I am going to do, at somewhat irate length): who in the world *knows or cares* about what IMWF is doing here? Which *workers* know? In East or West Europe, or even in *Geneva*? Which *metalworkers* know? Which *members of members* of the IMWF know? Which *leaders or activists* amongst these know? Which contribute *financially* (or is this all paid for out of some compensatory slush or hush fund of the European Union, rather than the solidarity funds of European unions?)? Which are *activated* by such activities? What attitudes or values are *transformed*? The fact is that even if the IMWF does have good policies, publications, databases and websites, it is *invisible* within national, regional and global civil society. As a socio-cultural factor - and balanced against the human-rights, ecological, women's, consumer, or even anti-dam movements - the IMWF hardly reaches weigh-in. What it seems, at best, to be doing is confirming what Manuel Castells (1996-8) has argued: that unionism, whilst still necessary for the defence of workers, has no emancipatory potential. Indeed, Castells suggests - in an argument yet more radical than that of the present book - that capital and labour exist in two increasingly separate *universes*, the space of flows and the space of places (discussed Waterman 1999a:366). So whilst the IMWF may be demonstrating that the forward march of labour has restarted, what it is so energetically promoting in Eastern Europe may do nothing to even check a forward march of capital that never halts. One can put this in much more practical, institutional and industrial relational terms: they are trying to project beyond the European Union, state-national collective bargaining or industrial relations practices that do not take account of the globalisation logic dominating the EU itself (Hyman 1999b:106-9).

The contributions on Mexico by Altha Cravey, and Japan by Robert Hanham and Shawn Banasick, actually reveal, even more dramatically, the subordination of traditional trade unionism - sometimes following considerable violence - to the spatial imperatives of

capital and nation-state. This has, of course, occurred in different ways, themselves shaped by worker resistance and even union achievements. But the problem for the unions is evidently more than one of ideology or strategy, since radical and even Marxist-led unionism has also been smashed or tamed in both places. It is revealing, again in both cases, that signs of hope are provided by the kind of movements already mentioned: oriented to the shopfloor, the local community, to cross-movement and cross-border alliances. In Mexico and Japan these often small and marginal movements seem to be recognising the global - in both the spatial and the holistic sense of this word. They are doing in practice what Walker is urging in theory.

I have no intention of spreading the aura of doubt or pessimism that surrounds even those international labour studies with other intentions. Nor to add to the optimistic trend, bent on service to, rather than critique of, contemporary international unionism. Nor do I wish to suggest that the current work leans excessively in one such direction. On the contrary. It reveals much past and locally-specific labour creativity. And by looking at labour in space it has itself played a role in creating, the work rather suggests the necessity for space-sensitive labour organising strategies. Here I am thinking of the more national or local cases in the collection. Thus, the Jane Wills chapter on space, place and tradition in labour organising in Warrington, UK, reveals how a local anti-union tradition can be transformed by contact with other workers/areas, and by the arrival of outside organisers. The uses of restricted locales (or specific *discourses* of insiders/outside) by local elites and capital are revealed in Don Mitchell's study of a Californian region in the 1930s. This again draws attention to the way in which restriction of relevant space, and the definition of such, can confine labour strategies that, particularly today, must be globally informed if they are to be locally effective. It also highlights the subversive impact of the non-local, the foreign and the stranger in the expansion of worker self-identity. And - speaking of discourses - the Lee Lucas Berman study of clerical worker organisation and struggle at Yale reveals how Foucauldian categories can be employed to analyse both elite strategies and labour responses.

All in all this is a pathbreaking collection, wide-ranging, rigorous and readily accessible to non-academics. There remains for me the Castells problem, indicated above, itself reinforcing the argument of David Harvey, a major source of Left historical-geographic materialism. A decade ago Harvey said:

[T]he capacity of most social movements to command place better than space puts a strong emphasis upon the potential connection between place and social identity. This is manifest in political action...The consequent dilemmas of social or working-class movements in the face of a universalising capitalism are shared by other oppositional groups - racial minorities, colonised peoples, women, etc. - who are relatively empowered to organise in place but disempowered when it comes to organising over space. In clinging, often of necessity, to a place-bound identity, however, such oppositional movements become a part of the very fragmentation which a mobile capitalism and flexible accumulation can feed upon. 'Think globally and act locally' was the revolutionary slogan of the 1960s. It bears repeating. (Harvey 1989: 302-3)

I take the positions of Harvey and Castells as serious warnings rather than apocalyptic inevitabilities. Harvey has, surely, already been proven wrong by the *new* global social movements that understand the dialectical interpenetration of the local and the global. As for Castells, he actually confines his strictures to *unions* rather than labour. This is the good news. The bad news, as suggested above, is that workers are in *local place* and capital in *supra-geographic* space! Castells does, however, seem to allow for labour to play a part in contemporary emancipatory movements but only in so far as it recognises (in my language) the equally particular universalisms of the new and increasingly global radical-democratic movements. Castells is also aware that our new world is networked as well as globalised and that, in confronting this, some emancipatory movements have no fear of flying.

It appears to me that a labour movement appropriate for a globalised and networked capitalism will therefore need to be not only aware and active *spatially* but also *holistically* and even *cybernetically*. The question is whether labour - or those who wish to reconnect the unions with Marx' '*real* movement that transforms the present state of things' (Arthur 1970:56-7. Original emphasis) - will see this as a threat to be defended against or a challenge to be confronted.

## **7. INTERNATIONAL LABOUR HISTORY: BACK TO THE FUTURE?**

Following up the notion that labour indeed has much to learn from the past, I will here consider two very different kinds of work. The first is that of Bob Reinalda, an episodic narrative history of one of those ITs that many consider hold the key to a revived future labour internationalism.<sup>16</sup> The second, by Forman, is a history not of international-

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<sup>16</sup>For a less episodic one, see the jointly-authored 500-page history of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers Associations (IUF) by Nystrom and Rutters (1989). This I only discovered, 10 years later, on the shelves of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, Johannesburg - suggesting that there might be a number of other such to be unearthed!

ism but of *nationalism* in the international labour movement. Whilst the first is more empirically central to our concerns, and will therefore receive most attention, it is the second that has the most radical vision.

It must be said that the important Reinalda (1997) collection on the International Transportworkers Federation (ITF) makes a curious initial impression. Some 10 of the 26 chapters are by Reinalda himself, including a chapter on the ITF as a transnational actor, which goes half a century beyond the indicated closing date. The Edo Fimmen of the subtitle, the longtime General Secretary of the ITF, and a major figure of interwar international unionism, is the subject of five or six separate chapters. The book was planned to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ITF in 1996 and appears to have been stitched together in something of a rush. The question must arise of whether such a fragmented work allows us to go beyond celebration and beyond 1996. I think the answer, in both cases, must be 'yes', even if this requires a considerable interpretative effort by the reader. The reason for this is the quantity and variety of material here assembled and, then, the quality of work by the 15 or so assorted European contributors. A pity, only, that Reinalda did not take the contributions and work them into an integrated monograph.<sup>17</sup>

The personification of the ITF with the figure of Fimmen (and other individuals sketched) opens up a relatively unexplored, and certainly untheorised, vein in the study of labour and socialist internationalism. We might, paraphrasing the Russian Marxist Plekhanov, call this the role of the individual in international labour history. We do need to reveal and understand the role of the active historical agents of labour internationalism if we are 1) to communicate internationalism to a non-academic readership, and 2) consider what kind of active agents - if not leaders - are required for a contemporary or future internationalism. Given the importance of this book, I will use it, alongside my own and other sources, to reflect on the future internationalism of the labour institutions.

The ITF came out of the wave of transportworker protest and action, particularly in the Europe of the 1890s-1920s. During the interwar years it was a significant part of the Social-Democratic union internationalism that was both independent of Moscow and opposed to the rise of fascism. Although closely allied with the *nation-state-based* International Federation of Trade Unions (1919-49), Fimmen himself actually favoured a general

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<sup>17</sup> Would it not have served the book's sponsor and publisher better to have translated and published the outstanding full-length history by contributor Sigrid Koch-Baumgarten 1988?

union international based on *industry* (an international of internationals). The ITF also established its place in relationship to the ILO, created to solve 'the social problem' after WWI. Despite its entry here into international collective bargaining, the ITF continued to support mass mobilisation and international industrial action. It also actively supported anti-fascist movements and underground unions within fascist states. The book gives extensive coverage of transportworkers' resistance to and under fascism before and during WWII. At this time the ITF contributed significantly to, and was supported by, the British and US anti-Nazi war efforts, thus discovering the benefits of collaboration with liberal-democratic states - and their intelligence operations. Although efforts were made to develop an anti-racist internationalism in the 1930s, this had reportedly booked little success amongst its major members by even 1953. Fimmen was a Dutch clerical worker, of christian socialist origin. He knew English, French and German, and represented the cosmopolitan and internationalist tradition within an international unionism increasingly divided by nationality, state and bloc (liberal, Communist, fascist). He made repeated attempts to breach the gap between the Social-Democratic and Communist trade-union internationals, earning himself little more than the abuse of the Communists, and scorn from his Social-Democratic comrades. He was also prepared to put his life and liberty on the line in defence of unions confronted with fascism.

Reinalda attempts to bring his account up to 1996, to theorise it, and project it into the future. But his theoretical sources exclude any Left-of-ITF ones, and his explicit frame of reference is the a-critical concept of the 'transnational actor'. His brief review of Functionalist, Rationalist and Extended (beyond the nation) approaches also excludes any source more recent than about 1980. He himself seems to favour the Extended approach in so far as this allows for the role of trade unionism within the 'international system'. Whilst this latter notion allows for recognition of the activity of the ITF in relation to, for example, the ILO or IMO (International Maritime Organisation), it is a positivist concept which restricts critique to the parameters of an existing institutional framework. His ten-page summary of the half century, 1945-96, highlights the ITF's longstanding campaign concerning sailors under so-called Flags of Convenience (cf. Lillie 1999). This is, indeed, one model of international unionism, in so far as 1) FoC ships are registered with pro-shipowner states, 2) crew are hired from cheap-labour countries, 3) effective solidarity action has been often taken by dockworkers acting in the interest of workers in this other industry. It involves the ITF in international negotiations, and results in equally interna-

tional collective agreements, including a shipowner-collected but ITF-administered welfare fund. Through such action the ITF has not only recovered millions of dollars in back-pay for crew. It also has a well-financed welfare function.

We need further research to establish the implications of all this. It could be that we have here a paternalist operation, in which the ITF provides services for a Third World labour force that has no direct, or even indirect, control over its benefactor (thus approaching the model of 'development co-operation'). There is also a paradox regarding the disinterested internationalism of the dockers here. When the Liverpool dockworkers called for international solidarity during their heroic strike against triumphant British neo-liberalism in 1995-8, the ITF had at least two reasons for failing to support them. The first was that these were, in a manner of speaking, subjects of one particular nation and therefore of a particular national affiliate of the ITF. (The British Transport and General Workers Union was itself afraid to openly support the strike). The second reason is that, given its role as collective agent for international FoC crew, it is registered as a national union under anti-union labour legislation in Britain, and therefore unable to take the requested solidarity action without risking its funds and/or its headquarters.

The fascinating account of ITF collaboration with US intelligence during World War II, by Reinalda himself, is *not* extended to the post-1945 period. But its involvement with the CIA during the Cold War is well-established, particularly in the violent repression of Communist dockworker unions in France and Italy, as well as in the even more violent repression of Communist and Left-nationalist unionism in Latin America and Africa. Irving Brown, long the leading AFL-CIO official within the ICFTU and international trade union movement, was also a sponsor of the ITF's Mediterranean Anti-Communist Vigilance Committee (for which see File 159/1/18 in the ITF Archive at Warwick University; Koch-Baumgarten 1999: Section 3.5.). New evidence reveals that he was also heavily implicated not only with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) but with the CIA's *mafia and drug-smuggling operations*. This was particularly, but not solely, with the infamous 'French Connection'. Brown worked here intimately with Pierre Ferri-Pisani, a 'drug smuggler connected with Marseilles crime lord Antoine Guerini' (Valentine 1999:62). Ferri-Pisani, a former resistance fighter, was a key figure within anti-Communist dockworker unionism in the Mediterranean. He was at one time an Executive member of the ITF, present at its congresses and conferences and wrote in its publications.



He committed suicide in 1961.<sup>18</sup> I mention all this to suggest how a shift from social mobilisation to identification with or dependence on hegemonic national or international power-holders, can descend into international conspiracy, espionage and, in this case, drug-running.<sup>19</sup> That this drug-running provided not only funding for Cold War unionism but also caused the deaths of tens of thousands of the - possibly non-unionised - poor in the USA reveals the most radical disjuncture that has ever existed between unionism as an international social project and unionism as an instrument of capital, state and bloc politics.<sup>20</sup>

Reinalda's treatment of the ITF's policy for the future shows it struggling to keep afloat in a world in which transport is being further rationalised, integrated, privatised - and internationalised on the FoC model (the case of aircrews, also dealt with in Lillie 1999). Regarding international transport policy, a longstanding matter of ITF concern, it apparently

believes in a rational, co-operative and publicly planned transport system, both nationally and internationally co-ordinated to provide an efficient and integrated service for goods and passenger transport. Broader social costs and benefits should be taken into account in transport planning, because of transport's social function. Current international trends to liberalise and deregulate transport are seen by the ITF as a step backwards from such a public service concept. The art will be to find a proper middle road between 'the extremes of a planned transport industry and its complete liberalisation'. (31)

This literally middle-of-the-road policy places the ITF alongside the more rational and farsighted international bureaucrats and technocrats, whilst accepting capitalism, and failing to relate to ecological or community movements with radically other visions. This

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<sup>18</sup> Some of this information comes from Rathbun (1996). This is a sycophantic, infantile and unreliable biography of Irving Brown, published by a vanity press. It is a fitting memorial to the *eminence grise* of Western cold war unionism. Brown reportedly told Rathbun that Ferri-Pisani committed suicide as a result of his concentration camp experience. Bearing in mind their common involvement with the French Connection, other possibilities may come to the minds of those who saw the movie of the same name. The mafia connections of Ferri-Pisani were, incidentally, known and published 21 years ago. This was in the classical British work on 'trade union imperialism'. Consistent with the somewhat erratic nature of this work, he is, however, here identified as Pierre Fissani (Thomson and Larson 1978:14).

<sup>19</sup> This is not to endorse the 'trade union imperialism' thesis of Thomson and Larson (1978), which sees unions as instruments of capitalism, imperialism or the Western bloc. The alternative position, as expressed in a book concentrating on the International Metalworkers Federation (MacShane 1992), rightly stresses the autonomous European and union origins of anti-Communism. MacShane, however, overstates his case, failing, for example, to even mention the relationship between Irving Brown, one of his major protagonists, and the CIA.

<sup>20</sup> However peripheral this episode might have been to the history of the ITF, a public coming to terms with this episode would certainly help the re-invention of the organisation as a radical-democratic and movement-oriented one.

is in itself consistent with a bureaucratic vision of internationalism, as a relation between national - in the future regional - union organisations, rather than between workers (far less between workers and allied movements). Neither the ITF nor Reinalda take account of worker-based movements that have questioned not simply the policies of the organisation but its structural form. I am thinking here primarily of two waves of waterfront dock-worker activity, the first linking West European dockers in the 1980s, the second springing from the already-mentioned Liverpool strike in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> In the first case the ITF was simply ignored as irrelevant. In the second case it was bitterly criticised - and circumvented. In the first case, the movement produced its own eco-socialist critique of the global transport industry. In the second it not only touched dockers in South Africa, Brazil and India, but led, in 1999, to a proposal for an international dockworker body, not so much opposed to as complementary to, the official unions. In both cases the 'relational form' developed was the network. In both cases the internationalism was one of communication rather than organisation. The fear or hostility the ITF shows toward independent international worker activity must lead one toward a certain scepticism concerning the extensive range of relations with new social movements reported by Lillie (1999). Whilst these are to be welcomed, one would need to investigate the extent to which they are internalised within the ITF, rather than being seen as external relations with allies, functional to an otherwise untransformed organisation and membership.

Reinalda's work is, in summary, a study of international unionism in the era of national/industrial/imperial capitalism. No more than any other internationalist could Fimmen avoid this maze. Indeed, he helped to create it at the same time that he tried to escape it. My point here is to reveal how contradictory a character international unionism had during this, now thankfully passing, era. It is also, of course, to suggest that the FoC internationalism of the ITF may be inappropriate as the model, or even *a* model, for the era of globalisation. We are going to have to work over this material with a more critical theory, and to cast our net wider than the institution itself. And, for a history relevant to the future, we may have to go back earlier than Edo Fimmen, to the Tom Mann and Ben Tillet Era. This period, beginning with the great London Dock Strike of 1889, was one in which British labour activists would, at the drop of a hat, go by rail and ferry to Antwerp or Rotterdam, to help organise strikers there. When, during the national British dock strike of

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<sup>21</sup>For which consult the relevant archives at <http://www.labournet.net/docks2/other/archive.htm>.

1989, the Liverpool dockers went off, quite spontaneously, to seek the solidarity of their fellows in Rotterdam, this was castigated by one ITF leader as 'strike tourism'.

And now for something entirely different. Or is it? It is rare enough to find a path-breaking book on the labour movement. It is certainly impossible to find one on *nationalism* that throws so much light, gives so much importance, to *internationalism*. Michael Forman (1998), another American, does not even *claim* to trace out the implications of his work for internationalism, even if he demonstrates greater insight than most would-be socialist internationalists. His claim is quite other. It is that the internationalism of the classical labour and socialist movement provided it with a unique understanding of nationalism, which it placed in intimate relation to ideas about 'democratic republicanism, sovereignty, and the nature of the internationalist labour movement itself' (viii). It was only as the socialists moved away from such a cosmopolitan view of democratic accountability that they became entrapped by nationalism. After Marx and Bakunin, after Bauer, Lenin and Luxemburg, after Stalin, and after Gramsci, what remained was a 'national liberation Marxism' (17). The rest is not so much history as the present of the ex-Communist world, explaining precisely why Gowan's East European socialism spans a spectrum from the Social Democratic to the National Socialist. Here is Forman's vision of the dilemma of the Left - indeed of democracy - in the era of globalisation:

The two main tenets of neoliberalism, free trade and privatisation, anchor elite discourse (though arguably not practice) on a world scale. Cultural phenomena originating in the advanced (post)industrial societies, from popular music to social movements like feminism and environmentalism, are being reproduced even in the seemingly most unlikely locales. International organisations, from the United Nations to the European Union and the Andean Pact, are proliferating and blossoming, albeit in stilted ways. At the same time, a second national awakening jolts the former Eastern bloc; exclusionary nationalism shocks the triumphant capitalist democracies; genocidal conflicts tear apart countries in Europe and Africa; and irredentism plagues Asia... Coupled with popular opposition to international arrangements (e.g. the Maastricht Treaty and the North American Free Trade Agreement) and broad-based distrust toward international organisations, these trends speak to a pervasive particularism as the modal response to the neoliberal capitalist world order. It is almost as if internationalism only survived in the boardrooms of the major transnational companies, while reactionary and progressive movements nurtured provincialism, albeit in different terms. (17)

I guess that the greatest value of Forman for our subject matter is in showing 1) the intimate interrelationship between a radical-democratic nationalism and internationalism, 2) the extent to which an internationalist orientation is necessary for any non-ethnic, non-particularistic, nationalism, 3) the necessity for any international union project to be rooted in such a broad vision of globalisation/nationalism/internationalism, 4) the necessity for a

new socialist and labour internationalism to address itself to the democratisation of such international institutions as do, or might, express a cosmopolitanism free of those capitalist interests that inevitably provoke localist and authoritarian reactions.<sup>22</sup> Forman mentions neither the ILO nor the ICFTU. He does, however, bring us at least to their figurative doorway. But, before entering, let us consider whether today the figure should be of a real door or a virtual portal.

## 8. UNIONS AND CYBERSPACE: USE AND VALUE

I recall, in the mid-1980s, as something of a promoter of international labour computer use, visiting a computerisation advice centre for workers and unions in Hamburg. When I asked whether the centre's impressive library and archive was computerised, they said, 'No: we are against computers!'. When, more than somewhat stupefied, I enquired how they then educated unionists about them, they pointed to a dusty PC under a bench, but took pains to reassure me that it didn't work. Around the same time, an American Leftist was arguing that

even a fairly small number of microcomputers, somehow linked, might make a sizeable difference, if they are available to workers [...] The common languages shared by computer users, even though limited in subject matter, together with the graphical and expressive possibilities of computers...are among the ways that computer links could help forge cultural unities between workers in different countries. (Goldhaber 1987:10-11)

Both then and now, much Left discussion of computerisation has divided the antis from the pros, the pessimists from the optimists - a clear indication of a primitive state of debate.

With international labour activists, engagement customarily preceded reflection. Computer communication is what made the new labour internationalism of the 1980s-90s possible. Which may be why the history of international labour computer communication can be rather seen in terms of the pragmatists and the utopians (which, of course, does not exclude the existence of pragmatist visionaries or realistic utopians). Those leaning to the pragmatic-if-visionary end of the spectrum are associated in my mind with the American Charles Levinson (Lee 1996). The position of this international union leader and writer,

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<sup>22</sup> He thus adds significantly to v.d. Linden and Lucassen 1999, whose learned and comprehensive essay on 'global labour history' curiously ignores both the international and any political implications of this history for the contemporary movement).

was consistent with his notion of countervailing power: *they* have them so *we* have to have them. The other tendency, represented by Goldhaber (1983 as well as 1987) begins with some notion of the emancipation of the working class: here, it is suggested, is a means of communication that can recreate the autonomous international working-class culture destroyed by the industrial and residential restructuring consequent on the rise of consumer capitalism.

There are other positions between and around. Tangential to the pragmatic position would be that of those who see unionism as simply adapting - and selling - itself to the computer industry. A Dutch article on unions and collective bargaining in the information technology sector, reveals the union to be primarily concerned to convince the dismissively anti-union managers that unions and collective agreements favour inter-company competitiveness and the development of capitalism - presumably of Dutch nationality...or at least base (de Vos 1999). My own position, tangential to the labour utopian one, has been that globalisation/informatisation makes both possible and necessary *a more general* 'global solidarity culture' to which international labour computer use must relate and to the creation of which it could contribute (Waterman 1999b). Richard Barbrook (1999a) goes further than the pragmatic and deeper than the utopian. He not only proposes cyberunions for cyberworkers but argues that the cyberindustry reveals the libertarian future within the hyper-capitalist economy.

Barbrook first argues, in a classical Marxist spirit, that this most advanced capitalist industry, child of the military-industrial complex and the university elite, is pregnant with an anarcho-communist future. Despite its increasing commercialisation and concentration, both anarchistic/creative individuals and profit-greedy corporations have found it essential to *give* if they want to get their lifeblood - information - back. Barbrook offers a history of capitalist development as well as its illegitimate child, the Left:

During the Sixties, the New Left created a new form of radical politics: anarcho-communism. Above all, the Situationists and similar groups believed that the tribal gift economy proved that individuals could successfully live together without needing either the state or the market. From May 1968 to the late Nineties, this utopian vision of anarcho-communism has inspired community media and DIY culture activists. Within the universities, the gift economy already was the primary method of socialising labour. From its earliest days, the technical structure and social mores of the Net has ignored intellectual property. Although the system has expanded far beyond the university, the self-interest of Net users perpetuates this hi-tech gift economy. As an everyday activity, users circulate free information as e-mail, on listservs, in newsgroups, within on-line conferences and through Web sites. As shown by

the Apache and Linux programs, the hi-tech gift economy is even at the forefront of software development. Contrary to the purist vision of the New Left, anarcho-communism on the Net can only exist in a compromised form. Money-commodity and gift relations are not just in conflict with each other, but also co-exist in symbiosis. The 'New Economy' of cyberspace is an advanced form of social democracy.

The New Left? And Anarcho-Communism? And Social Democracy? If this seems weird, exotic, even menacing, to those in the labour movement unfamiliar with classical anarchism or small 'c' communism, Barbrook's manifesto for digital workers may seem more pertinent. Expressed in the familiar internet form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), Barbrook (1999b) poses such as these:

- How does digital work differ from its analogue forms?
- How can digital work be creative?
- What distinguishes digital artisans from cyber-entrepreneurs?
- What divides digital workers from each other?
- What are the common interests of digital workers?
- How can digital workers organise to advance their common interests?

His answers require him to compare and contrast the craft, industrial and informational phases of capitalist labour, and to show how digital work can combine artisan skills with industrial productivity. He insists on the extent to which digital labour combines the worst of Fordist industrialism with the new artisan skills - technical, aesthetic and relational. He also recognises the extent to which the new reproduces the old class, inter-worker and inter-national divisions. His Post-Industrial, Post-Communist, Manifesto therefore seeks for common interests and, therefore, common organisation and action:

As in other industries, workers in the emerging digital economy also need to defend their common interests. However, most of the existing labour organisations are not responding quickly enough to the changes in people's working lives. Although formed to fight the employers, industrial trade unions were also created in the image of the Fordist factory: bureaucratic, centralised and nationalist. For those working within the digital economy, such labour organisations seem anachronistic. Instead, new forms of unionism need to be developed which can represent the interests of digital workers. As well as reforming the structures of existing labour organisations, digital workers should start co-operating with each other using their own methods. As they're already on-line, people could organise to advance their common interests through the Net. Formed within the digital economy, a virtual trade union should emphasise new principles of labour organisation: artisanal, networked and global.

This is, I feel, a realistic utopian writing relevant to our radically dystopian present. Its possible implications seem to me even more radical. In so far as his manifesto ap-

peals as much to *values* as to *interests*, is this a union or a social movement (I assume that the party, or at least The Party, is over)? In so far as it proposes a new principle of labour self-organisation, relevant to the new form of capitalism, is this only relevant to cyber-workers, or to all workers? In so far as a globalised and networked capitalism requires a form of organisation that is artisanal, networked and global, is this relevant not only to workers, but to all radical-democratic social movements everywhere (see Pollack 1999)? I lean toward the last answer to all these questions. My point is, obviously, not to deny the quite specific, if radical, proposal made. It is to extend it.

The necessity, or at least possibility of, such generalisation is revealed by Arturo Escobar, writing, appropriately, not of labour and organisations but of women and cyberspace:

Networks - such as women's, environmental, ethnic and other social movements networks - are the location of new political actors and the source of promising cultural practices and possibilities. It is thus possible to speak of a cultural politics of cyberspace and the production of cybercultures that resist, transform or present alternatives to the dominant virtual and real worlds. This cybercultural politics can be most effective if it fulfils two conditions: awareness of the dominant worlds that are being created by the same technologies on which the progressive networks rely (including awareness of how power works in the world of transnational networks and flows); and an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics (political activism of the Internet) and what I call place politics, or political activism in the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives. (Escobar 1999:32)

This literature engages energetically with an informatised capitalism, where previously-reviewed work either ignores it or waves vaguely, if favourably, in the general direction of a computer-empowered unionism. If we put together the arguments of Barbrook and Escobar, we can see how labour could re-insert itself into the '*real* movement that transforms the present state of things'. How, against this background does the latest major contribution to the literature on unions and computers fare?

Art Shostak (1999) is an American labour specialist, educator, sociologist and futurist. His *CyberUnion* belongs to a quintessentially American tradition of post-industrial, hi-tech, up-beat, hot-gospel, hard-sell, can-do works such as *Megatrends* (Naisbitt 1982). Published in hardback in May 1999, in paperback in September, this inspirational/educational handbook is likely to find itself on large numbers of North American trade-union bookshelves, or in an equal number of Christmas stockings. If anyone can sell fast computers to slow unions it will be Art Shostak. Based on a series of easily-memorable formulae and slogans, one can imagine it being chanted, memorised and ap-

plied. He divides unions into three categories, according to their attitude towards computerisation: CyberNaught, CyberDrift and CyberGain. Moving up this ladder unions will be in a position to adopt 'a Third Wave CyberUnion F-I-S-T Model'. FIST here stands for Futuristics, Innovations, Services and Traditions. What 'traditions' seems here to mean is the undifferentiated celebration of an unexamined past we can find in another particularly American obsession, the search for 'roots'. Shostak identifies himself with the new AFL-CIO of President John Sweeney, which is apparently committing itself to infotech with the same enthusiasm that it is adopting an 'organising model' instead of, or in addition to, a 'service model' of unionism. This latter is a development considered sceptically by Kim Moody (1998: 71-2), who also stresses the new leadership's 'obsession with technique, media dependency and a proliferation of institutes' (68). Moody stresses what is missing in the Sweeney revolution, this being democracy - a word absent from Shostak's index, even if he shows a final sensitivity to the issue.

In promoting his model, Shostak quotes approvingly the 'computer-savvy' Research Director of a US trade union:

"I've saved thousands of jobs, thousands! We come into bargaining knowing more about the company than they do, by far. We've researched everything, I mean everything - their return on investment, their philanthropy profile, their executive profit-sharing payout...like, I mean, everything! When they say they can't afford this or that, we come right back and show them how they can - and we show them what they will gain if they do...And when we've got the contract we were after, we sell it to our members, and begin to prove to the company they were right all along to go along". (229-30)

Is this the language of the trade unionist or the managerial consultant? What tradition is being here promoted, if not that of Samuel Gompers and the Business Unionism which led to the long decline of the old AFL-CIO? It is evident that corporations want, if any kind of unionism at all, only that which increases profits. But is it the function of computer-empowered unionism to demonstrate to corporations, and workers - with higher speed and greater efficiency than heretofore - that unionism endorses this bigger-union-slice-of-bigger-capitalist-pie ethic?

Readers may suspect a certain Olde Worlde distaste for New World razzmatazz in my initial response above. They will be right. But my reasons are not necessarily those of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European literary visitor. The question in my mind is whether style does not itself carry an ideological and/or a pedagogical, charge. Like his pro-capitalist fore-runners or models, Shostak is selling, not proposing. He provides answers, not questions.



The reader is therefore being asked to believe and buy, not to think, far less to criticise. There are quite other styles of popularisation and mobilisation. One common North American - now possibly international - style is that represented by Kamel and Hoffman above. An earlier one would be that of the international worker film, photography and theatre movements of the 1920s-30s. Although the most dynamic of these were the Communist ones, rapidly reduced to pro-Soviet ones, the notion here was of international worker self-activity, based on a critique of capitalism, and of an oppositional and collective alternative to such. Adapted to our present world and means of communication, what such a model might suggest is that of an international worker, or labour, or radical-democratic, computer movement.<sup>23</sup> As a matter of record, both radio and video have their own alternative international networks - and books (Girard 1992, Thede and Ambrosi 1991). In this very area of international labour computer use we have the admirable handbook of Eric Lee (1996) which, whilst being equally enthusiastic, is far less formulaic, far more question-raising, and is cognisant of labour traditions far wider than those called upon by Art Shostak. Shostak's book not only fails to deal substantially with union democracy but also that of the national - indeed universal - kind as US union activists confront corporations for the right to communicate electronically within their workplaces (Cohen 1999).

The breathless enthusiasm of Shostak for a Born-Again Unionism obscures the quite dire condition of the US movement revealed not only by such Left critics as Moody but by passing passages in Shostak himself. The fact that 25 percent of unionists have PCs needs to be balanced off against the fact that they are an income elite (wages 34-73 percent higher), and that they are only 10-12 percent of the workforce. In San Francisco, December 1999, I was informed that even the computer-operating and computer-owning longshoreworkers, who had been active in the campaign of solidarity with the Liverpool dockworkers, used computers at home primarily for the consumption of entertainment. Addressing these issues would lead to a book that might raise consciousness as well as increase use.

Those aware of such shortcomings of Shostak can still make good use of it. Each chapter ('Computers as a Servicing Aid', 'Computers as an Organising Aid') is followed by

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<sup>23</sup> I once made the mistake of proposing this model to a Dutch trade union workshop on communications, to be met by looks of not so much hostility as blank incomprehension.

readings that enable us to see how computer-oriented unionists in the US are thinking and acting. Each chapter is also followed by sources and resources. And it must be recognised that Shostak may be more generous to radical others than this radical other has been to him. So one can find many Left and innovative books and sites in his lists. His final part is, indeed, devoted to 'A Little Help from Our Friends' (activists, women, international labour movement). His last chapter is a problem-raising and reflective one on 'The Choices We Must Make'. And his last sentence begins:

All the more reason to seek resolution soon of five significant challenges the use of computers poses for organised labour, namely, finding the right ways to subsidise access, to relate to union democracy, to protect against technological tyranny, to establish high standards, and to promote vision-aiding possibilities in computer use. (22)

Pity he didn't start the book with this conclusion. And spell out his vision thing.

## **9. LABOUR AND GLOBALISATION: THE DIALOGUE OF WHICH MILLENNIUM?**

I recall here - vaguely given the passage of time - Philip Roth's scandalous novel of the 1960s, *Portnoy's Complaint*. After a couple of hundred pages of hilarious but anguished sexual confession, it turns out that we are in the psychiatrist's chamber. And Dr Rosenstein-Gildenstein (or whoever) says to the narrator, 'Gut. Shall ve begin?' (or whatever). Much of Labour's Complaint, as reported above, seems to have been taken on board by the *Conference on Organised Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (COL21). Now to be seen on a computer screen near you.

This international, trilingual, electronic conference is intended to contribute to a four-year research programme on the same subject, run by the ILO's International Institute of Labour Studies (IILS). COL21 is co-sponsored by the ILO and the ICFTU. Although officially launched in mid-September 1999, the conference site has an early list of contributions from 1998. In mid-August 1999, when I signed up to participate, the site further reported a December 1998 consultation, and published the contributions of three participants. It also published a Background Document, identifying as key areas for discussion:

- the changing patterns of employment and union membership,
- change in management-labour relations; the public status of unions,
- the impact of a hostile economic environment,
- the threat/challenge posed to national unions by economic internationalisation.

The conference is 'aimed at trade unionists and labour researchers', intended to be open, and to allow for some kind of dialogue. Thus, there is offered the chance to respond to the two opening speakers, Juan Somavia, General Director of the ILO and Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the ICFTU.<sup>24</sup> Guest speakers will be regularly invited to act as panellists on subjects related to the above document. In a further specification, themes are extended to:

- employment and development,
- law and unions,
- responses to globalisation,
- unions and structural adjustment,
- collective bargaining and social dialogue,
- informal sector and marginalised workers,
- social protection,
- recruitment and organising,
- political strategy (relations with parties and NGOs),
- women,
- youth,
- union structures and services.

This event appears to have not only high web visibility but also legitimacy within at least parts of the labour movement internationally. My concern is that the initiative be not limited by the apparent ideological, institutional or even electronic parameters of the event. Let us consider these.

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<sup>24</sup> The opening statements of Somavia (1999) and Jordan (1999) were received too late for them to be added to, or substituted for, the statements discussed below. That of Somavia adds little either in quantitative or qualitative terms, reiterating the compromise at the origin of the ILO: 'Yes to the market economy and no to the market society'. That of Jordan is more substantial in both terms, addressing itself to globalisation, the nation-state, global institutions, the corporations, the NGOs, and to the national and international union movement itself. It still, however, seems to be deeply divided in its concerns and address. Thus, it tries to combine a concern with 'balance' and 'fairness' within a globalising market society (which it does not call capitalist), with a morality that is in conflict with such. In the absence of specification, any such ethical appeal as might be here suggested is bound to be diffuse in meaning and blunt in effect. And the ICFTU address seems to be as much to governments, interstate organisations and corporations (persuading them to act in more civil ways) as to workers and citizens (mobilising them to civilise the hegemonic forces). Perhaps the most interesting parts are those concerned with the unions themselves and with their relations with the NGOs. It is to be hoped that these matters will be taken up during COL21.

### **The theoretical/ideological parameter: assuming that which requires questioning?**

I am here going to consider the three initial 'non-interactive' papers posted on the COL21 site in 1999. Whilst not being ILO papers, they were obviously invited and posted on ILO initiative. They may be taken as suggesting at least the initial ideological extent and limitations of the planned event.

A couple of quotes from the COL21 paper of Henk Thomas (1999), a Dutch social-democratic professor of labour studies at an institute of development studies, reveal an analysis that not only assumes uncritically the past, present and future development of capitalism, in all its emanations (and under all its pseudonyms), but also an existing inter-state hierarchy, with unions everywhere in the female inferior position, i.e. providing a service to male superiors. Thus, in

Western European countries...the labour movement has continued to acquire a high degree of legitimacy in addressing issues of the wider social agenda. One may...mention the role of the labour movement...in restructuring the economy, such as the need for wage restraints in the eighties when global competitive forces had a huge impact on the reshaping of Western European economic structures as well as on major characteristics of labour markets. Also, the distinct role that trade unions have played in enterprise restructuring, such as in the restructuring of the automobile industry in the United States, is proof of union strength and potential[...]

A special policy issue forms the role which 'development co-operation' may play in strengthening the position of trade unions in weak labour markets and in situations where as yet no organisational labour strength could be built. 'Development cooperation' - both bilateral and multilateral - has at times allowed for generous donations to the trade union movement. For example, special subsidies granted to 'donor' trade unions to enable programmes of institutional building for the 'receiving' labour organisations. Such funding may have a 'national' approach and thus contribute to the building and expansion of strong programmes of international co-operation. Also, cases such as the Danish one with a strong preference for multilateral channelling of funds, e.g. through the ILO or ICFTU, each with its regional headquarters, have become part of the current donor scene.

I will not go into the assumption about union legitimacy within Western societies (widely noted as falling, since the 1960s, along with that of government, political parties, the churches, business, the judiciary, the press). Nor about the, now-rejected, US auto union's 'company-union love-fest' (Moody 1998: 63). The major point to be made is that the argument uncritically assumes: a certain underlying institutional framework (if we include particular labour market patterns); the 'developmental' function of trade unions within both 'developed' and 'developing' countries; that those of the former should act as (state-funded) patrons/missionaries/ intermediaries in relation to those of the latter. 'Development' here, means, at least implicitly, the development of *capitalism*. There is an assumption, further,

that developed capitalism means developed unions, with the best developed union/capitalism relation being in states like The Netherlands and Denmark, which also have extensive state-funded programmes for 'developing' countries. The notion that, particularly with globalisation, we are in one world of struggle, in which the first may be the last and the last may be the first (earlier, admittedly, a Christian notion than a Social-Democratic one), appears foreign to Thomas. There is here accepted, in other words, almost everything that has been questioned or problematised in the earlier part of this essay. The analysis, it must be said, also lacks any sense of crisis and seems motivated or informed less by any academic discipline, theoretical school, social values or humane ethic than by the purpose of advertising a policy or consultancy service to 'development co-operation' in general, the ILO and ICFTU in particular. As such the piece seems unlikely to be of value to those within these institutions who recognise that the crisis of labour internationally is a crisis not only *for* but also *of* these institutions. Or who, unlike Thomas, recognise the existence of globalisation - or at least 'globalisation'.

Robert Taylor is the labour specialist of the *Financial Times* in London (a fact curiously unmentioned by the ILO). His contribution (1999) is consistent with the pieces of Breitenfellner and Ramsay, covering much of the same ground. It also assumes tripartism, therefore ruling this out of discussion. In line with a tripartite view of the world, he is as much concerned to adjust unions to global capitalism as global capitalism to unions. And he considers that (inter)government organisations can or should play the articulating role between these:

[I]t is evident trade unions...need to demonstrate their approach is not incompatible with the creation of successful market economies. Trade union rights are good for workers but they are also good for business. The most affluent countries in the world are the ones which not only have trade unions but also integrate them successfully into their societies through forms of corporate governance and in alliance with non-governmental associations.

Few trade unions have managed so far to come to terms with the new world of increasing globalisation but if they hope to survive and grow again they will have to make radical accommodations...[T]he need for more transnational industrial relations requires the trade unions to reassert their primary objectives in a modern language that resonates in the flexible labour markets and workplaces...But the attitude of governments cannot remain passive and disinterested. A sympathetic public policy approach is required if trade unions are to develop, providing legal frameworks that do not prevent the development of transnational industrial relations[...]

For success, more trade unions at international level will need to forge links with non-governmental organisations. In its 1997 report on the state in a changing world, the World Bank called for a public strategy that required trade unions to

establish networks that embrace the wider civil society beyond any specific workplace or industry with environmental, community and women's groups. In this way, it is argued, they can reach common cause, integrating producer with consumer interests and helping to revive a more active and ethically responsible social citizenship. This will be helped by the changing role of the state from being less the direct provider of rights and services to being the enabler of diverse and pluralistic activities in a society which encourages and promotes secondary and autonomous civil associations. It means also trade unions will have to make a strategic break with their more traditional workplace-centred culture and embrace more decentralised and flexible structures that appeal more to individual employees both as workers and consumers.

It is somewhat alarming for myself - as an advocate of a unionism oriented toward social movements and civil society - to here discover how rapidly the World Bank has adopted and adapted these into something functional to its own hegemonic purposes (though this is, as argued below, a game that subalterns can also play). More alarming is to see Taylor *depending on* the state and interstate organisations to legitimise social alliances between movements that, in recent decades, have themselves identified capital, state, technocracy, patriarchy *and the World Bank* as the source of the problem rather than the means to a solution (George and Sabelli 1994:223-51)! Global civil society is here reduced to a global neo-Keynesianism.

Richard Hyman (1999b) is a professor of industrial relations, with a reputation as a Marxist theorist on labour. He also falls amongst my institutionalists, but his point of reference and address is clearly the labour movement rather than 'industrial peace', 'development' or tripartism. In confronting the multiple global crises - of work/lessness, of unionism and of society more generally - he seeks solutions within the labour movement itself, or around it amongst allies. His central argument is the necessity for labour to begin a new battle of ideas. In part this is by entering the institutional/ideological terrain of the new workplace and processes, revealing their contradictions or duplicities, and bending them to worker interests. He proposes a new labour project addressed to Security, Opportunity, Democracy, Community and Solidarity. This is a thoughtful and provocative piece that should appeal to the more modern and/or radical international unionists. Above all, it reconnects a contemporary or future unionism to its origins, and with a broader social and international history:

'Solidarity forever' is one of the most fundamental trade union slogans. Solidarity has a double meaning: support by union members' for each others' struggles, but also support by the stronger for the weaker within society (or indeed between nations). The broader, moral underpinnings of collective action have in many countries become eroded; if solidarity is to survive, it must be re-invented. The diversity of work and labour market situations in the contemporary world means

that a traditional, standardised trade union agenda can be neither practically effective nor ideologically resonant. The task is to move from an old model of mechanical solidarity to an new model of organic solidarity...Any project aiming to create such a model must recognise and respect differentiations of circumstances and interests: within the constituencies of individual trade unions, between unions within national labour movements, between workers in different countries. The alignment and integration of diverse interests is a complex and difficult task which requires continuous processes of negotiation; real solidarity cannot be imposed by administrative fiat, or even by majority vote. Its achievement is possible to the extent that unions rediscover the conviction, and persuade both their own members and members of civil society more generally, that they have a mission as a 'sword of justice'.

I am not convinced that the Hyman strategy, of against-from-within, is one that can connect the labour movement with others that begin from non-, anti- or post-capitalist premises. Nor am I sure whether the 'continuous process of negotiation' between workers, between unions, between countries, can be carried out in a forum hosted by the ILO, sponsored by that organisation and the ICFTU.

### **The institutional parameter: the ideologies of the structures**

We are, today, increasingly sensitive to the power relations underlying and surrounding, as well as within, our theoretical, ideological, analytical or strategic utterances. The notion of a 'Conference on Organised Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'; that it is hosted by the International Labour Organisation; that it is sponsored by the Director of the ILO and the General Secretary of the ICFTU; that it is meant to contribute to a project of the ILO's research institute; that this dialogue is being monitored by the ILO; that it is in all or part copyrighted - all these must be seen as *part of* the process, and therefore likewise open to analysis and challenge.<sup>25</sup>

Both the ILO (as the highest instance of international labour relations, norms, laws) and the ICFTU (as the major international representative of unionism) are today suffering something of an identity crisis. This is, as already suggested, a result of a revolution within capitalism which is tending to undermine and/or circumvent them. Both the ILO and the ICFTU are products of the national/industrial/colonial stage of capitalist development. Both were products of massive (inter)national social movements, conflicts and con-

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<sup>25</sup>The notion that structures carry their own ideologies comes, relevantly, from a critique of the ILO by Jeff Harrod (1977). Harrod's paper actually gives an overview of the history, structure, activities and functioning of the ILO, with a particular focus on the 'developing countries'. It therefore also deals with the 'ideology of the programmes', and the tensions between the two ideologies. Along with the elsewhere mentioned work of Robert Cox, it provides an essential point of reference for a contemporary critique of the ILO.

sequent world wars. The ILO, and the ICFTU's forerunner, the IFTU, came out of the social conflicts that preceded WWI. They represent a surprisingly long-lived and durable international compact between unionised labour, capital and state. They could also be seen as having offered, jointly, a cosmopolitan and reformist alternative to the Communist International and revolutionism. The ICFTU came, similarly, out of WWII, being even more marked by what now became the Cold War between the liberal capitalist West and the authoritarian Communist East - with each trying to control the de-colonising South. Both the ICFTU and the ILO are literally *international* in the sense of their constituents being defined in terms of nation-state identity.

Jointly these institutions have expressed a liberal-cum-social-democratic project of bipartite or tripartite labour relations. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century 'social problem', Labour versus Capital, became the 20<sup>th</sup> Century 'social compromise', with the State as supposedly neutral arbiter. Since 1945 the ILO and ICFTU have increasingly shifted the focus of their attention (and funding) from the socially unstable capitalist core to the socially unstable capitalist periphery, and their primary discourse from 'industrial peace' to 'development'. The ILO might be surviving better than the ICFTU in so far as it long ago discovered how far 'work' goes beyond the sphere of bi- or tripartite industrial relations. What is more, it continues to be a state-funded organisation (despite continuing tensions with the US), has massive staff and resources, and is part of a family of United Nations agencies. The ICFTU, on the other hand, has a tiny staff, its affiliates grant their international a token one percent of their national income, and it is thus dependent for 40 percent of its income on state or inter-state 'development co-operation' funds.

The ILO and ICFTU were also marginalised, in different ways, during the UN-sponsored Social Summit of 1995. The ICFTU found itself defined as one non-governmental organisation amongst a myriad, rather than the privileged representative of the poor. It was reduced to publicly arguing that the event should have been run by the ILO, or on ILO lines, which would have put Labour proudly on the podium, as a partner of Capital and State, patronising the 'single issue' NGOs! Yet the ICFTU is for 40 percent of its activity, the kind of development NGO it was, until just after the Social Summit, either dismissing or denigrating.

Given all the above, it seems reasonable to speculate that Bill Jordan and Juan Somavia (who was Chair of the 1995 Social Summit!) are jointly concerned to either restore their organisations as the central international institutions of labour representation,



dialogue, compromise and norm-setting for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> In so far as the ILO represents a contribution toward a cosmopolitan law above that of competing and conflicting capitals and nation states, one should be in favour of not only preserving but extending it. This would be compatible with the argument of Forman, as well as of more substantial arguments in favour of cosmopolitan democracy and global citizenship (Held 1995). Held, indeed, even seems to consider the ILO, with its tripartite structure, to be some kind of model for a reformed set of UN institutions open to civil society. I do not know, to start with, whether significant representatives of capital, capable of taking decisions on behalf of their constituency and/or imposing 'best practice' standards upon them, are interested to take part. I am, moreover, not sure whether labour should favour structuring capital/management into interstate bodies of any kind. Most radical-democratic global movements are trying to *reduce* the direct or indirect influence of capital within such.

*The current crisis of the ILO.* I cannot claim current expertise on the ILO.<sup>27</sup> But I am generally aware of the challenge presented to it by the development of new interstate institutions more central, or more appropriate, to the development of a neoliberal and globalised capitalism. And of the concern of itself and its supporters that the ILO should both assert itself and adapt itself to neoliberalism, globalisation, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. As Breitenfellner (1997:544) says:

[T]he...ILO...is unique in that it is tripartite...offering an example of how a future 'global social partnership might function'. If the ILO were strengthened, it could take its place beside the...WTO...IMF...and the World bank in the concert of world economic organisations' (Breitenfellner 1997:544)

And, as the ICFTU (1996) put it, in a defensive and diplomatic statement, addressed to the ILO's Governing Body, it should

- ...ensure that any steps to modify ILO procedures or structures are taken in full respect of the organisation's established mandate and with the aim of advancing its objects;

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<sup>26</sup> Although a well-informed respondent to a draft of this paper assures me that it was an ITS initiative, with the ILO being suggested as a less-partisan convenor of such a dialogue than the ICFTU itself.

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, I am not sure who has such. Twenty years ago, a detailed, professional and damning criticism of the ILO was made by Robert Cox, a former insider, a highly-respected innovator in international and industrial relations theory (Cox 1996). This suggested it was bureaucratic, authoritarian, secretive and over-anxious to mollify the then-hostile government and unions of the USA. The ILO was thus apparently unfit to play its international liberal-democratic role even in the Old World Order. One would like to know whether it has become more democratic, flexible and independent of the hegemonic states in the intervening period.

- ...continue to promote the ILO's role in international economic and social policy-making, particularly through enhanced and balanced co-operation with the IMF, the World Bank, the UNDP and the WTO, with a view to ensuring that considerations of social justice are taken into full account, and that workers' rights are respected;

The problem for the ILO is that the major corporations, capitalist powers, and the others involved in this concert, consider the ILO and long-standing labour rights and procedures as obstacles to 'free trade'. And that the ILO, like most traditional liberal or social-democratic organisations, feels obliged to persuade these other parties that it is not so. One major way it has been trying to do this is through a new Declaration on Fundamental Principles (ILO 1998) that allows governments to accept the traditional standards - but without actually ratifying or applying them. The earlier-mentioned campaigning body, the Open World Conference, which has collected hundreds of labour movement signatures to a letter addressed to the WTO 1999 Conference, puts it like this:

In June 1998, under pressure from the WTO and IMF to create a 'less constraining framework for ensuring international labour standards', the ILO adopted a new 'Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work'. The principles and rights promoted in this declaration correspond to seven of the existing ILO Conventions. On June 20, 1999, the G8 Summit in Cologne, Germany, issued a communiqué pledging to 'promote effective implementation' of this new ILO declaration.

We, the undersigned, state categorically: If this ILO 'Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work' is to be of any value to working people the world over, the seven corresponding Conventions of the ILO must be ratified, implemented and enforced fully by every government participating in the WTO Summit in Seattle! (OWC 1999a)

As an inter-state organ, the ILO has never been able to impose the standards it sets. Rhetoric has always been more important than enforcement. This might be no bad thing in a movement or organisation addressed to the mobilisation of civil society. But this is hardly the image created by the ILO. And now it is confronting its crisis by further reducing such power as it might have had and reinforcing the rhetoric. Two questions arise in my mind here. The first is whether a policy of concession or appeasement is the wise posture to adopt in the face of fundamentalism. All labour and democratic history suggests the opposite. The second question is whether the ILO should even be trying to establish a niche as an *international financial or economic development institution* rather than the international labour rights one. I do not pretend to have an answer to this one. But, in any case, it does seem clear that the ILO is in need of not simply defence or reform but of reinvention

in the light of the labour problem and the relevant social forces, as they exist under globalisation, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

*The current crisis of the ICFTU.* As for the ICFTU, it seems to have been emasculated by not only the neoliberal assault but the *very collapse of Communism!* The ideological identity and often fragile cohesion of the ICFTU has, since its foundation, been largely dependent on being the enemy of its enemy. The loss of its own evil empire has left the ICFTU no other enemy than one which has not only become extremely powerful, aggressive and elusive (the Castells argument), but which appears not particularly interested to compete in the International Tripartite Games.<sup>28</sup> It is true that the ICFTU *has*, in the footsteps of Amnesty International, proven capable of sharply criticising the USA, the core capitalist state (which combines the maximum labour rights rhetoric with the minimum national and international implementation of ILO standards). In a detailed 15-page statement it declares that

The USA has ratified only one of the seven core labour standards, which cover the right to organise a trade union, to bargain, the prohibition of discrimination and child labour, as specified by the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO). This is one of the worst ratification records in the world... (ICFTU 1999)

But it shows little or no capacity to address the international labour movement and public opinion about such issues, far less to mobilise them for visible and effective action. Indeed, I was only made aware of this document by the campaigning, mobilising, international labour network, the One World Conference (mentioned above and below). On globalisation, however, the ICFTU repeatedly finds itself outflanked. Whilst it was proposing or negotiating for a social clause in the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, a network of campaigning social movements and NGOs not only opposed the MAI but (taking advantage of inter-state contradictions) destroyed it. And whilst the ICFTU seeks for a place within the existing international financial institutions, others are insisting on the need and possibility of surpassing them with more relevant and democratic alternatives (Held 1998).

We thus seem to be faced with a major problem concerning what I would call 'the principle of articulation for international labour and labour internationalism'. This is not

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<sup>28</sup>Indeed, this is also true of Social Democratic *national governments*, including 'Third Way' New Labour in the UK. See New Statesman 1999). One wonders how the attitudes of such might be projected within the ILO.

only a matter of union ideology/ies, nor of their limited, varying or even declining representation of both labour-in-general (including that of women, the casualised, the self-employed) and the waged/salaried. It is a matter also of the relevance of even meaningfully representative-democratic *organisations* to both a globalised and networked capitalism and to any kind of labour *movement*. It has been suggested in a number of places above that the appropriate form for movements (national and international) today is that of the network, coalition or alliance. It is these that can be, as Enzensburger (1976) said of the electronic media, 'As free as dancers, as aware as football players, as surprising as guerrillas'. Yet it would seem madness to reject the representative-democratic organisation that is, for millions of workers world-wide, their only defence against an increasingly global, aggressive and destructive capitalism.

Perhaps the solution lies, precisely, in distinguishing between labour *representation* and labour *movement*, between *international labour* and *labour internationalism*. International labour could be seen as *represented* by the organisation, *gelled* in the institution; labour internationalism could be seen as *advanced* by the network. This may seem to be the empirical case when we consider the various conferences on labour and globalisation mentioned below. For the traditional international institutions of labour representation this would imply three steps:

- Abandoning the notion that they are either the sole or the privileged representative of labour. This is, after all, a privilege that, since it relates to the passing period of national-industrial capitalism, is also a prison;
- Recognising the network and networking as the source of movement and innovation. This would mean welcoming labour and labour-allied networks or NGOs into their fora - including that of the ILO;
- Recognising that the new internationalism is, primarily, a communications internationalism, with electronic media as primary means and a global solidarity culture as central value.

Much of such a programme of reinvention is, I think, either implicit or explicit in the earlier reviewed material. The rest is being, or could be, advanced by the networks.

Just as the networks in and around labour provide the - or at least a major - source for re-invention, so could and should institutionalised international labour be for the ILO. International labour surely needs to see the ILO not so much as a fortress that protects it

than as a public platform from which it can address not only capital and state but global civil society (here understood as a site of permanent struggle against the ideological and institutional hegemony of market and state). I have already suggested the necessity for the inclusion of all relevant expressions of labour discontent (whether women's, environmental, petty-entrepreneurial, rural, etc). I have here no model in mind, but critical reflection on the UN Conferences and Summits of the 1990s might produce one.<sup>29</sup>

### **The computer/communicational parameter: no parameters?**

Participation in COL21, after just a week or so in August 1999, was impressive, in terms of numbers (462 signed up, almost 100 introductions/contributions), as well as of the interests and backgrounds of respondents. I had expected the response to be strongly skewed toward the US and UK, the academy, and the usual on-line suspects - Young, White, Male, Professional, Northern.<sup>30</sup> A rapid and impressionistic analysis, based on some 48 contributions, spread over four days in late-August, revealed the following: 43 were from core capitalist countries, primarily anglophone, mostly North American; 44 were from males; 25 were from union activists or employees and 25 from academics (the last two being often overlapping categories); 12 were from pro-labour NGOs; 16 appeared more oriented toward collective bargaining; 26 were concerned with international labour issues. About age and ethnic origin we can only guess.<sup>31</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss such a participation, as limited precisely to the usual suspects. I prefer to take note of it as qualifying the open and international nature of the event, whilst stressing its radical potential. This lies in the number of academically-qualified/employed and union-oriented/allied participants concerned with the future of labour under conditions of globalisation. Moreover, the marginal presence of women, people from the capitalist periphery, non-anglophones, is not the end of the story. This is not, after all, an election, it is a discussion and even, possibly, a dialogue. Whilst we could

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<sup>29</sup>So might a critical reading of O'Brien et. al (eds), (Forthcoming). This deals with the relationship between the international financial institutions on the one hand, and the women's, ecological and labour movements on the other.

<sup>30</sup> For a direct contribution to COL21 (unpublished as of mid-November 1999?) from an Old, White, Male, Professional, Northern, Academic, see Waterman 1999c.

<sup>31</sup>As of mid-October 1999, the number of contributions had risen to over 250. Although the intention was for participants to respond to the two opening statements (by now translated into Spanish and/or French), these had given rise to no serious overall response. Indeed, the only on-going debate was that about social clauses. Important as this issue is, the failure of more general discussion to develop is both surprising and disappointing.

end up with a lot of white, northern, anglophone, pro-labour academic guys talking to each other (about the implications of globalisation for anglo-saxon-type labour relations, and their European or international projection), the weight readers accord a particular contribution is not going to be determined by its representativity but its perceived pertinence. Let me select a few messages, from just one day's mail, that I perceive as pertinent for a dialogue on labour in the age of globalisation:

**Date : Thu, 19 Aug 1999 10:09:46 +0200**

**Subject: hello from san francisco**

**Message: #1**

My name is Medea Benjamin and I am the director of corporate accountability for the human rights group Global Exchange. I have been focusing on US transnationals and their labor practices overseas. Global Exchange was one of the groups spearheading the campaign against Nike for labor abuses in Asia, and we are presently undertaking a campaign against the garment company the GAP,pressuring them to pay their factory workers a living wage and allow independent monitoring of their factories. We also recently launched a campaign around US businesses and workers' rights in China. I am very interested in being in touch with people who are involved in labor rights in the garment/shoe or toy industries so that we can collaborate!

**Date : Thu, 19 Aug 1999 10:31:57 +0200**

**Subject: Introduction**

**Message: #5**

Hello and greetings from Vancouver. My name is Ritu Mahil. I became a union organizer at age 5 when my parents first organized the Canadian Farmworker's Union. One of my earliest memories is picking berries on a farm, pretending to be a farmworker, and signing up members. Anyway, I've stuck with the movement ever since. Last year, as part of the Graduate Students' Society on campus I helped organize our university TAs into CUPE Local 4163. I am currently completing my Law and Master's of Public Administration degrees from the University of Victoria. My main motivation for pursuing both degrees was to further my understanding of labour relations. I am fortunate to presently be working in a firm in Vancouver which exclusively practices trade union side labour law. I am hoping to complete my MPA degree next year as well and am searching for a thesis/project topic which will combine my legal training and my interests in organized labour.Looking forward to an interesting discussion.

**Date : Thu, 19 Aug 1999 10:58:32 +0200**

**Subject: Re: Introduction**

**Message: #13**

Hello to all participants; This is Kwang Young Shin. I am a professor in sociology at the Chung-Ang University in Seoul, Korea.I am doing research in labor movement and labor politics in the developing countries and the developed countries in a comparative perspective. Now I am working on the shifting labor politics during the political transition and economic globalization in East Asia. I am also interested in gender and labor movement. I teach industrial sociology, political sociology and class analysis. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to engage in the electronic conference on "Organized Labour 21", which will be vital for the next labour's struggle for justice and equality. Let's share our experience and research for the future.

How the ILS understands and uses the contributions is yet to be seen. This forum is, after all, created for the purposes of the ILS itself, the ILO and the ICFTU. But, if the initial participation is seen as potentially more radical than these bodies have demonstrated themselves to be, so are the parameters of an electronic forum more porous than those of an academic or trade union conference or publication.

I have been wondering whether such an open electronic conference, with email distributed by a list, and an accessible online archive of contributions, does not facilitate or provoke the creation of one oriented less to international *labour relations* and more to the international *labour movement*. What I am thinking about is the possibility of creating a parallel, or consequent, site/conference, in an electronic equivalent to the famous 'sealed train'. As some readers may recall, Lenin returned to Russia from Switzerland during World War I, taking advantage of an offer from the German military-industrial-political elite, which mistakenly thought he would only undermine the Russian war effort. More recently, the same principle was exploited by East German dissidents, using West German audiovisual media to get their message back through East German censorship. Cyberspace is not necessarily more democratic than other media, but it is infinitely more open and flexible.

Certain international labour lists or sites have already signalled the existence of COL21, praised it or encouraged their visitors to take part in it. But what I am speculating about is the creation of a space oriented toward the international labour movement, which could, for example, download selected contributors/contributions, to encourage a more movement-focussed conference. There is, more modestly perhaps, nothing to prevent one creating, from contributions to COL21, one's own database of interesting email addresses, so as to invite participants to a parallel/later site or conference. And then, more ambitiously, of seeking to involve those presently marginalised or excluded.

The basis for my reflections here is a certain familiarity with the limitations of both the international trade union websites and the autonomous international labour ones. The former are, customarily, trade union bulletins or magazines in electronic form. They do not usually invite discussion. They may have areas locked off from the public. They are intended to broadcast, one to many, like a radio transmitter, not provide feedback like,

well, a computer network.<sup>32</sup> By the autonomous ones I mean the websites or lists run by pro-labour groups or individuals, and intended precisely to encourage direct solidarity, participation and feedback. Some are highly professional. Some are very lively places. Most are non-party and non-sectarian in both form and content (though self-obsessed and fundamentalist socialists have found the internet a godsend: at last they can practice their solipsism on a world scale). The lists often carry discussions, though these tend to be on immediate and dramatic problems or campaigns. Websites may indicate discussion pages. However, neither the themes discussed nor the range of discussants has, over a period of several years, touched what is already suggested by COL21.

## **10. LABOUR AND GLOBALISATION: WHICH DIALOGUE OF THE MILLENNIUM?**

There *are* academic and/or labour equivalents to what the ILO is offering. There has, indeed, been a flood of such that have either recently taken place, are taking place this year, or to be expected in the future. Given the sponsoring and the agenda of the ILO/ICFTU event, these deserve attention. For five examples consider the following:<sup>33</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> *World Meeting Against Globalisation and Neoliberalism* was to be held September 1999 by Brazil's major trade union centre, the Central Unica de Trabalhadores (CUT 1999, Working Class 1999). This was to include the following elements:

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<sup>32</sup>For a devastating critique of UK union sites see Lee 1999. For directories of relevant labour discussion documents and sites, see LabourStart 1999 and Workers on the WWW Unite! 1999. For an exceptional non-anglophone labour site, see Chronique de l'itinérant Électronique 1999.

<sup>33</sup>I am excluding consideration of two other union events on globalisation I have become aware of since completing the body of this paper. One is an international seminar proposed for Bangladesh, about which I have no other information, and which was still seeking foreign funding in September 1999. The other is a Conference on Globalisation and Labour Standards, apparently organised by the ICFTU, December 1998. Consistent with the ICFTU tradition of obliging the nobility, this one actually invited the Director General and senior staff of the WTO to a day of consultations there! See

<http://www.icftu.org/english/pr/1998/eprol267-981203-dd.html>. I am also leaving out of consideration the events due to occur in Seattle, USA, late-November 1999, during the WTO's conference there (Seattle Weekly 1999). This event is evidently going to see a major confrontation between capital/state on the one hand and a global-civil- society-in-the-making on the other. Unlike such previous confrontations, both the US and the international trade union organisations are going to be prominently present. A major US coalition, the Citizens' Trade Campaign, is attempting to co-ordinate the positions of a broad range of NGOs, unions and other movements. Given the ICFTU's ambiguous (at best) position on the WTO, its relation to this event (which will include civil disobedience and, possibly, violence against property and persons) will bear watching.



- Lecture on Global Capitalism (Brazilian economist)
- Report on European Union (ETUC and European unionists)
- Asian Crisis and Workers' resistance (KCTU, Korea)
- South Africa Today (COSATU, South Africa)
- Latin America, Mercosur, Nafta and trade unionism (3 lecturers plus Latin American unionists)
- Final declaration
- Public event: Against Neoliberalism! In Defence of Workers' Rights!

Whilst both programme and format belong to the tradition of Left/nationalist unionism in Latin America (the official Cuban unions are involved), whilst contributions are structured nationally/regionally, and whilst it is set up in opposition to 'collaborationist' unionism, it is addressed to globalisation, includes trade unions from Africa, Asia and at least Western Europe. And the network base of the event is intended to avoid competition with existing internationals.

*The Open World Conference in Defence of Trade Union Independence and Democratic Rights* is a French-US Trotskyist initiative that has had considerable impact within national trade union movements in Europe, the Americas and even further afield. Its Western Hemisphere Workers Conference Against NAFTA and Privatisations, in November 1997, expressed itself against neo-liberalism and globalisation in terms of traditional Leftist/nationalist denunciation. But its Organising Committee has moved on to a much more specific and nuanced stand, in its earlier-mentioned declaration on international labour standards, the ILO and the WTO (Open World Conference 1999a). The proposal for its February 2,000 Conference in San Francisco also suggests something more specific in subject matter and broader in participation than the Brazilian event (Open World Conference 1999b):

- The Struggle Against Child Labour (Helio Bicudo, member, Human Rights Commission, Organisation of American States, Convenor, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the International Tribunal against Child and Forced Labour)
- The Fight Against Sweatshops, Delocalisations, in Defence of Labour Codes and ILO Conventions (Rubina Jamil, Chair, All Pakistan Trade Union Federation and Coordinator, Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links)

- The Fight Against IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Plans and the Struggle to Cancel the Debt (South African trade union leader)
- The Independence of Trade Unions in Relation to New Regional Structures - the Case of the ETUC (Patrick Hébert, General Secretary, CGT-FO, Loire Atlantique Region, France)
- In Defence of Free and Independent Trade Unions (a leader of the independent trade union movement in China)
- Report on the International Tribunal on Africa (Norbert Gbikpi-Bennisan, General Secretary, National Federation of Independent Unions of Togo)

There are workshops and panels proposed on: trade union independence; women and globalisation; the struggle for peace and self-determination; the struggle against racism and oppression; civil society and NGOs; labour-management co-operation programmes; and on the final conference declaration.

The US event, *Unions and the Global Economy: Labour Education at the Crossroads* (Bronfenbrenner email to COL21, August 14, 1999), is co-sponsored by the AFL-CIO, US labour educators and the Industrial and Labour Relations school at Cornell University. Themes include:

- Meeting the global economic challenge
- Labour education in union transformation
- Union strategies for worker cross-border power
- Impact of globalisation on workers, unions, communities
- Teaching global solidarity
- Race, class, gender and the global workforce
- Bargaining with MNCs
- Sweatshops, child labour and global solidarity
- Maquiladoras
- Immigration and globalisation
- Community, regional and consumer coalitions

Then there is *LabourMedia99*, in Seoul, November 1999 - the second such International Labour Communication Conference/Festival to be hosted in South Korea. Having attended the first, in 1997, I am aware just how professional, wide-ranging and advanced

these are. Although associated closely to the Left opposition Korean Trade Union Confederation, the event is again organised by a network of media NGOs. The relationship posed between new communications technologies and the labour movement is as follows:

- As globalisation of capitalism and new development of labour movement in the world scale become apparent, new communication strategy is needed through the experience of labour movement in every nation. (The appearance of unyielding labour movement and unemployed movement in developed countries, the progress and dilemma of new labour movement represented by Korea, Brazil, South Africa etc, the start of labour movement in developing countries in Asia).
- The progress of digital technology as the main axis of scientific revolution has reorganised industry, culture and political relation dramatically. And the progress of technology which is combined with new liberalism has changed social situations that surround the workplace and has also given new weapons to the labour movement.
- Therefore, we need to construct new internal labour communication network and at the same time, alternative communication structure against conservative structure of mainstream media.
- In this sense, many different issues about labour movement and communication should be proposed and the necessity of estimation for actions and making for new prospect should be demanded. (Korean Labour Media Newsletter 1999. English uncorrected)

The proposed programme includes the following workshops:

- Current labour struggles and the role of the labour net [meaning labour networks in general - PW]: capital flows, working hours, internationalism, unemployment;
- Confrontation with the Millenium Round of world trade negotiations;
- International solidarity of labouring women;
- Task and situation of the labour net worldwide;
- Possibility of establishing a global labour net;
- Information technology (IT) and the labour movement;
- Labour struggles, IT and the media;
- IT, workplace surveillance and the labour movement;

- Internet broadcasting and progressive movement strategies;
- Possibilities of a progressive and/or labour TV channel;
- Possibilities of radio is one of the old media;
- The labour video movement.

What the hosting of this event suggests to me is that any notion that technology, labour movement modernisation and innovatory strategies flow Northwest to Southeast is, at the very least, outdated.

Finally, there is the *Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights* (SIGTUR) Conference, hosted by the South African COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), Johannesburg, October, 1999.<sup>34</sup> This certainly overlapped with the previous events in sponsorship, attendance and concerns. It struck, however, a number of quite original notes. This 'South' is not confined to the periphery, since the initiative comes from Australia, and it includes South Korea. Moreover, it was supported by a number of the ITSs. The initiative was considered complementary to, not competitive with, the established international unions. In the words of its convenors, 'it creates space and meets needs'. The agenda was itself innovatory, with the intention to focus on commitments to relevant action by participant unions within a specific time period. The first full day highlighted an Australian (and international) campaign against the mining multinational, Rio Tinto, that also involved communities, the human-rights and ecological movements. The second dealt primarily with workplace and national union responses to the affects of neo-liberalism, in terms of organising strategies to regain members, reach out to new types of worker and to relevant communities. The third day concentrated on 'building global unionism', as exemplified by a co-operation agreement initialled on the spot between the unions covering two ports with a recent history of solidarity (Durban, South Africa and Freemantle/Perth, Australia). It also proposed a common international Mayday for the year 2,000 (quite a challenge considering Mayday's decline in the North and its often national/ist character in the South). In the mind of its Regional Co-ordinator, there lay here an express aspiration for a 'global social movement unionism':

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<sup>34</sup>I attended this event after completing the bulk of this paper. I am currently writing up more extensive reflections on the event under the working title, 'The Internationalism of Labour and the Labour of Sisyphus'. More reports should be appearing in a special supplement of the *South African Labour Bulletin* late-1999.

The radical nature of global restructuring and the high mobility of capital requires a global unionism... Moves are now in place to forge sector to sector links across specific countries to trial run global unionism. Linkages through personnel exchanges will transmit national experiences thereby creating a readiness to act in the cause of geographically distant workers for these distant workers will now be represented inside the collaborating union, working to raise the awareness levels [...] When Australian [dockworkers] leaders visited the Durban docks in South Africa to personally thank workers for their boycott actions, there was a high demand for T-shirts and other symbols. These one-off meetings are valuable. Shared experience creates a real sense of international solidarity... However, these positive acts do not create a global unionism. For this to happen, structural links with a degree of permanence have to be formed. Certain unions are already in process to review the form of this change. This will be considered at the conference [...] Unions that are presently leading global campaigns against multinationals have found it essential to turn outwards and form community alliances. The multinational mining giant that is attacking worker rights in Australia in the name of individual freedom is the same company that is cutting into Malagasy's ancient forests to sand mine. The interests of green groups and unions coalesce [...] The conference will explore the mechanics of these strategic shifts. The outcome will be the first building blocks of a global social movement unionism not as an abstract theoretical idea, but as a concrete organisational shift worked through in all its detail. (Lambert 1999b:88-9)

Singly and collectively, these diverse, independent but often overlapping events suggest a significant revival of labour movement thinking and action on globalisation and internationalism.<sup>35</sup> Three are 'Southern' based. All seem to consider the South as part of an interdependent world of capitalist work and labour protest. They are looking, often explicitly, for a global unionism to confront a globalised capitalism - although what 'global unionism' might mean is not yet clear. We are going to need, eventually, an analysis of these events to see how they compare/contrast with each other and with COL21. But, being 'real' rather than 'virtual' conferences, we have to assume they will be restricted in attendance and reach. There is here an interesting paradox. I only got to know of these 'real' events because of the worldwide web. But they have here an extremely restricted presence and impact. They appear, or become accessible, only via lists and (personal) email. They do not have their own websites. A lack of virtuality, at least for internationalist movements today, seems to me to be an increasing restriction on their reality. Every reason, therefore, to take part in the ILO/ICFTU event and oneself to test the parameters indicated

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<sup>35</sup> They also overlap with such 'non-labour' international conferences as a general one on 'alternatives to globalisation', organised by the 'national-democratic' movement in the Philippines (IBON Foundation 1999). Despite this background, and the regurgitation here of what has been earlier called 'national liberation Marxism' by the Communist Party of the Philippines and the Kilusang Mayo Uno union federation, this event was also the occasion for some radical new thinking about not only forms of action but even socialism as *the* alternative to globalisation. The contribution here by James Petras (1998) was primarily intended to present a socialist alternative. But it also represents a quite radical alternative to any existing socialist strategy I am aware of, national or global.

above. And every reason, on the ILO/ICFTU side, to ensure that at least the outcome of these events are made available on or through its own site.

## **11. CONCLUSION: NOT SO MUCH IN AND AGAINST AS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE**

I recall here the slogan of radical British social workers in the 1970s, 'In and Against the State', and consider how it might be made appropriate to radical democratic purposes in the era of an informatised and globalised capitalism. The notion of being simultaneously inside and outside appeals, in so far as we cannot even evaluate the inside unless we also stand outside, and we certainly cannot move beyond it without this at least imaginary elsewhere. But whether, in this case, one has to be not only outside but also against, I am not so sure. I am certainly concerned to revolutionise the institutional, ideological and electronic parameters of international labour and labour internationalism. But, to my mind, revolution in this era is less a matter of creating, a 'world turned upside down', a 'first liberated territory', than in infiltrating the borders, shifting and broadening the parameters, changing the focus, and working toward a new labour internationalism and institutionality that complements that of the other radical democratic social movements internationally.

This inside/outside, finally, applies not only to the old organisations/institutions. It has to apply also to such events as that of Sigetur. This has itself a problematic geometry, lying as it does on different criss-crossing axes: between a Left, but diplomatic, union internationalism and a radical-democratic assembly of labour support groups; between unionists and academics; between the (semi-)industrialised and powerful Australian/Korean/South African unions and the more traditionally 'Southern' ones. These tensions led, at their sharpest point, to an apology from an Australian convenor to the conference in general, and a pro-Chinese Indian union delegation in particular, for allowing a Hong Kong-based labour support group report on worker and union repression in China!

As I have already suggested, the creation of a new labour internationalism lies not in some pre-existent power, privilege or – evidently - even an initiative from the periph-

ery. It lies, rather, in a dialogue between those occupying different and unequal positions within, between and even around this triangle of internationalist empowerment.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> I adapt this concept, somewhat cheekily, from Lycklama à Nijeholt, Vargas and Wieringa (1996), since their feminist triangle of power relates the empowerment of women to a relationship between movements, politicians and bureaucrats dealing with women's questions.

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