Trade Union Internationalism and a Global Civil Society in the Making

Peter Waterman and Jill Timms


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instance, are bilateral and regional trade agreements, migration, corporate governance, international financial institutions and poverty reduction strategy papers, the social and labour impact of multinationals, and global trade union strategies (GURN, URL). With the hypothetical exception of the last, these priorities fall within the traditional limits of a century-old international social partnership between unions, states and capital. It therefore remains to be seen whether GURN will produce any union vision independent of that of the ILO, the oldest of the interstate organisations within the United Nations system.

At WSF4 trade union organisations, national and international, were present in greater numbers and with a higher profile than ever before. A major way in which they revealed their presence was through the programme ‘Labour in WSF 2004’. This brought together international trade union organisations and federations and their national affiliates, as well as independent trade unions and labour-supporting NGOs. The programme was intended to address the issues facing workers in both the organised and the unorganised sectors worldwide (Mathew and Shetty, 2003). Eye-catching posters, banners, flags and other materials displaying the ‘Labour in WSF 2004’ logo and the names of trade unions taking part were strategically displayed throughout the forum site. All this suggests growing international union recognition of not simply the WSF but of the new ‘global justice and solidarity movement’ (Global Solidarity Movement) and the ‘global civil society’ that the forum is taken to symbolise. When one considers that, up to the mid-1990s, the ILO’s international union organisation, was still resisting identification with international NGOs at the Social Summit of the UN, the increasingly enthusiastic commitment to this new agenda must be seen as a turning point.

These two events, with their strikingly different natures, can also be seen to symbolise two historical periods, two phases of capitalist development, two institutional settings – and two ‘worldviews’ within which trade unions have tried to defend or advance internationally the interests of their members in particular and of wage earners generally. In this chapter we consider, first, the long but little-known history of trade union internationalism, and second, the contemporary structures of the international union organisations. The third section explores the responses of the international unions and wider labour movement to neo-liberal globalisation, and we conclude with some reflections on conceptualisation, communication and political strategy.

History of union internationalism

The present or future significance of trade union internationalism, or its relationship to a ‘global civil society in the making’, cannot be considered in isolation from its relationship to internationalism more generally, its past emergence and its recent marginalisation.

Whereas in the USA, ‘internationalism’ is commonly understood as an approach to foreign policy, in Europe and elsewhere, it is generally understood as a left-wing or democratic project for creating relations of solidarity between social classes, popular interests, and progressive identities, independently of, or in opposition to, the state or capital. Internationalism existed before unions or labour movements, and was often independent of the latter. For example, pacifist, feminist, and cultural versions of internationalism were elements of European democratic thought and politics in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But, as the word ‘internationalism’ itself indicates, it was also a universalism or cosmopolitanism of the epoch of nation-state building. Although labour and socialist internationalism might have been first expressed in cosmopolitan terms (Tristán, 1843/1967), what later developed were relationships of solidarity between unions that were increasingly identified with nation states, nationalists and nationalisms.

The rise of industrial capitalism in nineteenth-century Europe led to waves of labour and socialist internationalisms. Associated with ‘The Manifesto of the Communist Party’ of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1935) and with the International Working Men’s Association (or First International), which lasted from 1864 to 1872/3, labour and socialist internationalism came to be almost synonymous with the word ‘internationalism’. After the 1890s, by aligning with, or creating its own, women’s, peace, and anti-colonial fronts, labour and socialist internationalism largely hegemonised the word. Trade union internationalism, as the most direct international expression of the working-class movement, was seen as the heart of labour and socialist internationalism. From the 1890s to the 1960s, it was also the most resilient and best-organised part, and, through its representation in the International Labour Organisation (founded in 1919), the only one with a recognised place within the new inter-state sphere.

The history of general labour and specifically union internationalism falls into the following three periods (cf van der Linden, 2003):

1. As does a matching international Master’s course on global labour policies (ILO, URL).
workers has made ‘atypical’ an increasingly archaic descriptor. The increased proportion of casual, temporary and non-waged practice whereby different major social interests become equal partners in overseeing state and economic development. It therefore contrasts with the individualist bias of liberalism or the class-conflict bias of socialism. Here, ‘corporatism’ is used to refer to the state ideology and development of the labour internationalism of skilled male workers in increasingly large-scale capitalist industries. Labour and socialist internationalisms often combined with anti-racist, anti-slavery, and anti-authoritarian internationalisms. Increasingly, this second phase was characterised by national and international union internationalisms, relations between nationally institutionalised unions, mostly of male industrial workers. Labour and socialist internationalisms tended to prioritise themselves over the ‘other’ internationalisms, such as those concerned with peace, women, or national independence. But labour, cooperative, and socialist internationalisms were also increasingly separated from each other, often with bitter ideological, strategic, bloc or jurisdictional disputes. The prioritisation, institutionalisation and ‘nationalisation’ of the various internationalist labour and socialist bodies during this period also led to increasing shrinkage and self-isolation. Union institutionalisation nonetheless permitted the creation of robust national and international organisations. These were ideologically distinct and often incorporated or marginalised (where not repressed) in wartime, but were revived and reshaped as a result of the two world wars and related waves of social and national rebellion and revolution. The unions also established their presence in the interstater sphere through their 25 per cent representation in the ILO. Anti-fascist internationalisms appeared in the 1930s. The period after the Second World War saw increased union corporatism, national and international, West, East, and South, and a consequent loss of the vanguard role that labour and unions once played in internationalism more generally.

3. The beginning of a globalised capitalism, c 1980s–present. Although proletarianisation and factory industrialisation continue to spread (particularly in China), we observe also widespread deindustrialisation and shifts to the finance, services, tourism, information and entertainment industries, and to new forms of employment and new types of worker in new countries. This period is characterised by a crisis of traditional union internationalism, along with the fragile beginnings of new kinds of labour solidarity. The new labour internationalism encompasses a range of ‘post-state-nationalist’ relations with or between ‘working classes’ of all kinds, ‘typical’ or ‘atypical’, unionised or not, often in networked form. This is a period of disorientation, flux, and experimentation, in which the traditional union internationalisms and the new international labour networks are in both tension and dialogue.

### Table 8.1: Three periods and types of labour internationalism

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<tr>
<th>Period 1: Early (largely European) craft and industrial capitalism, c 1830s–1870s</th>
<th>Generic international of socialists, unionists, cooperators, and left democrats. London, capital of the major industrialised liberal countries of Europe, is their privileged meeting place.</th>
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| Period 3: The beginning of a globalised capitalism c 1980s–today | The marked appearance of specialised international/regional labour information, research, communication and support services, as well as alliances beyond the unions, often taking NGO or network form, whether created outside the union international, sponsored by, or allied to such (see Table 8.3 for a sample of these) |

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2. The mature industrial–national phase, c 1880s–1970s. This phase encompassed the industrialising peripheries of metropolitan capitalism. It even included the non-industrialised peripheral countries, which adopted metropolitan ideologies and patterns of unionism. Increasingly, this second phase was characterised by national and international union internationalisms, relations between nationally institutionalised unions, mostly of male industrial workers. Labour and socialist internationalisms tended to prioritise themselves over the ‘other’ internationalisms, such as those concerned with peace, women, or national independence. But labour, cooperative, and socialist internationalisms were also increasingly separated from each other, often with bitter ideological, strategic, bloc or jurisdictional disputes. The prioritisation, institutionalisation and ‘nationalisation’ of the various internationalist labour and socialist bodies during this period also led to increasing shrinkage and self-isolation. Union institutionalisation nonetheless permitted the creation of robust national and international organisations. These were ideologically distinct and often incorporated or marginalised (where not repressed) in wartime, but were revived and reshaped as a result of the two world wars and related waves of social and national rebellion and revolution. The unions also established their presence in the interstate sphere through their 25 per cent representation in the ILO. Anti-fascist internationalisms appeared in the 1930s. The period after the Second World War saw increased union corporatism, national and international, West, East, and South, and a consequent loss of the vanguard role that labour and unions once played in internationalism more generally.

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3. The increased proportion of casual, temporary and non-waged workers has made ‘atypical’ an increasingly archaic descriptor.
The global workforce today consists of 3 billion people, of which an estimated 164 million are members of some form of trade union (see Box 8.1). What recent developments have led to this situation? And how do the unions relate to each other?

The major international players
During the latter half of the twentieth century, the international trade union movement was dominated by a small number of organisations, not all of them international (Waterman, 2001a). The best-known are or were: (a) the Communist-controlled World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in Prague, largely denuded of members and influence by the collapse of the

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Communist world in 1989 (Waterman, 2001b); (b) the social-reformist ICTU in Brussels, which has grown as a result of the same process; and (c) the (ex-) Social Christian ICFTU in Brussels, which has grown as a result of the same process. Throughout the twentieth century and beyond, the American Federation of Labour–Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) has played a major international role. It has been inspired more by the American variant of ‘social unionism’ than by social democracy. The AFL-CIO was a major influence within the ICTU and also a major independent operator. It has acted through corporate and/or state-funded agencies for Asia, Africa and South America, and also engaged in activities in Europe and the Third World in a clandestine or at least low-profile manner (Carew, 1996; Clarke, 1994; Ruiz, 2004). Its work is now carried forward by its Solidarity Centre. In a unique development, the AFL-CIO foreign policy [as we must call it], has been subject to challenge by its California state branch, the largest in the country, representing one in six of AFL-CIO membership, which published a challenging resolution, significantly entitled ‘Build Unity and Trust among Workers Worldwide’. After calling for an opening of AFL-CIO books on its contribution to the Pinchot Coup in Chile, 1973, condemning the war in Iraq, and throwing doubt on its dependence on external funding, the resolution calls for the AFL-CIO to henceforth ‘fund its international programs and activities, whenever possible, from funds generated directly from its affiliates and their members’ (Hiscox 2004). Whilst this resolution might seem overly cautious, no such significant critique has been launched by solidarity activists in Europe, where similar state-dependency pertains.

In addition, there are the oldest international union organisations, those related to specific trades or industries. The most significant are what were once called International Trade Secretariats (ITS), now reduced in number by mergers (as a consequence of industrial transformation or falling union membership) and renamed Global Union Federations (GUFs). ITSs and GUFs have long considered themselves more unionist and less political than the ICTU. They have, however, been similarly associated with social reformism and the ICTU, and are now literally linked to it through the Global Unions (GU) website. Also allied to GU is the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the OECD. A formal structure of regional organisations is affiliated to the international confederations and their related industry-specific federations. But within Europe, there is the independent European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), both addressed to and dependent on the European Union. Something similar may be emerging in the Common Market of the Southern Cone of Latin America (MERCOSUR). Significant regional union structures also exist in Asia, particularly those of the ICTU (Greenfield, 1999). And then there are the regional internationals, also dependent on inter-governmental structures, in the Arab world and Africa. Recently, efforts have been made to coordinate the policies and activities of European–international federations and those of Latin America (GTU-C-MEC-ES-ORIT-CLAT, 2004).

How international trade unions operate

Formally speaking, most of the world’s trade unions are representative democratic organisations, are controlled by their members, and advance the interests of the working class, generally. They act either defensively for particular categories of workers or more assertively, often by becoming partners or leaders in movements for national liberation, for political and social democracy or for general movements of the poor. However, as acute observers have noted, with the passing of the decades, and not only in the West, and sometimes in the iron law of oligarchy (Michels, 1915), have themselves become ‘managers of discontent’ (Mills, 1948/2001; Castells, 1999), and become involved in ‘neo-corporatism’ at the risk of making themselves irrelevant (Gorz, 1999a). Throughout the twentieth century, at the regional and global levels, these threats to the unions’ social presence and impact increased. Their distance from their base increases such dangers. Despite their considerable differences – involving ideology, industry/occupation, worker constituency, or geographical reach – the international organisations share a number of common characteristics. They are remote from workers on the shop floor, in the office, or in the community, who, indeed, are usually unaware of their existence. They were, and are, marked by their past participation in the Cold War. They tend to reproduce the structure and behaviour of interstate agencies. They were, and are, largely Northern based, led and staffed (see Figure 8.1). They have tended to reduce the complex reality of working people worldwide to a Western model of the unionised (or unionisable) male worker in lifetime employment in a large-scale capitalist or state enterprise. Where they have adapted Western unionism and ILO tripartism in response to the problematic Third World, they have generally adopted the developmentalist ideologies dominant in the North. The ‘free’ Western internationals have become Europenized, there is the state funding for their ‘regional’ or ‘development’ activities, thus taking on the role of state or interstate development agencies. This is not a matter confronted in the otherwise admirable European-based collection on ‘Trade Union and NGO Relations in Development and Social Justice’ (Eade and Leather 2004; see critique in Waterman 2004).

Where independent Southern regional organisations have been set up, such as the International Confederations of Arab Trade Unions or the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity, this has often been on the initiative of such states or groups. And such new organisations have, like the Southern states and interstate agencies themselves, tended to reproduce rather than challenge the traditional model and relationships.

The place of the ILO

We have already mentioned the ILO, the interstate body for labour questions, which became part of the UN in 1945–6. The ILO was established after the First World War in an attempt to provide the growing international labour movement with an alternative perspective to that of insurrection (developed by the Russian Revolution of 1917, and not only in the West, and major uprisings in Scotland and elsewhere). The influence of Social Christian doctrine (Pope Leo XIII, 1891) and other such ideologies of reform from above cannot be ruled out. Although described as ‘tripartisan’, the ILO is, of course, an inter-state organisation, in which power is divided between national governments (50 per cent), employers, (25 per cent) and labour (25 per cent). On a liberal-pluralist view, the ILO is an international reflection of the liberal-democratic nation state, with government(s) holding the scales between labour and capital in order to further economic development, social justice and the general interest. A political-economic view might be of an early twenty-century settlement between capital and the state (75 per cent) on the one hand and labour (25 per cent) on the other. At the same time, however, the ILO, as an interstate bureaucracy, has enjoyed relative autonomy from national and international capital and the nation state, and has created both ‘texts and pretexts’ (as feminists said about the 1995 World Conference on Women, Vargas, 2003: 53) for unions to lean on or make use of. (For current standards and campaign of the ILO, see Table 8.2.)

The ILO has never had the weight of an institution like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) behind its conventions and standards. It does have procedures for inspection and the handling of complaints, but these are inevitably legalistic, complex, and prolonged. If, between the two world wars, the ILO concentrated on social peace in Europe (the heart of labour discontent) after 1945–50 it concentrated on the ‘developing countries’, the new source of global disorder. The conflict between the ‘ideology of the structure’ (liberal and/or social democratic) and the ‘ideology of the programmes’ (developmentalist from the 1960s) has long been noted (Harrod, 1977). In 1969, on its fiftieth anniversary, the ILO was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. It also launched a huge, expensive – and quite ineffective – World Employment Programme. The man responsible for this declared that ‘We frequently had to say that organised labour was [here] an obstacle’ (Emmerij, 1988: 119). The ‘we’ here clearly excludes one of the three parties that the ILO was and is assumed to represent – workers.
Figure 8.1: Contemporary labour organisations and structures

**International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU)**
- www.icftu.org – based in Brussels and claims to represent 150 million workers, including those in:
  - 10 Global Union Federations (GUFs)
    - Education International (EI) – www.ei-ie.org – based in Brussels
    - International Federation of Chemical Energy, Mine and General Workers (ICEM) – www.icem.org – based in Brussels
    - International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) – www.ifj.org – based in Brussels
    - International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotel, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers (IAU) – www.iau.org – based in Geneva
    - Public Services International (PSI) – www.world-psi.org – based in Brussels
    - Union Network International (UNI) – www.union-network.org – based in Nyon (Switzerland)

**World Confederation of Labour (WCL)**
- www.wcl.org – based in Brussels and claims to represent 30 million workers in:
  - 7 International Trade Federations (ITFs)
    - International Confederation of Employers in Public Services (IUNEP)
    - International Federation of Trade Unions of Transport Workers (FOIST)
    - World Confederation of Teachers (WCT–CSME)
    - World Federation of Agriculture, Food, Hotel and Allied Workers (WFAFW)
    - World Federation of Clerical Workers (WFCW)
    - World Federation of Industrial Workers (WFIW)
    - World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)

**World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU)**
- www.wftu.cz – based in Prague and claims to represent 67 million workers, including those in:
  - 3 Trade Union Internationals (TUIs)
    - Trade Union International and Allied Employees (TUI)
    - Trade Union International for Energy, Metal, Chemicals, Oil and Related Industries (TUI–WEMCORI)
    - Trade Union International of Workers in the Building, Wood, Buildings Materials and Allied Industries (UTIBB)

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Examples include:
- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) – www.etuc.org – based in Brussels
- Central Única dos Trabalhadores (Brazil) (CUT) – www.cut.org.br – based in São Paulo

**International Labour Organisation (ILO)**
- www.ilo.org – based in Geneva
This is the UN organisation for labour issues made up by:
- 50% national governments
- 25% employers
- 25% labour representatives
At the end of the twentieth century, international trade unionism was confronted by a tragic paradox. There were more wage-earners than ever before: 2.9 billion according to the International Labour Organisation. Globalisation implied the simultaneous weakening of traditional unionism’s century-old national–industrial base, the shift of that base to countries of the South (particularly China), and the undermining of traditional job security and union rights, and the decline or disappearance of support for social-democratic parties, socially–reformist governments and the most powerful interstate agencies. Moreover, the unions were being confronted with a fact that – in their industrial, national or industrial–relations cocoons – they had never previously felt it necessary to face: in this globalising world of labour, only about one in 18 workers was unionised. Finally, with the disappearance of their

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Campaign or programme</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/dyn/declarations/DECLARATIONWEB/INDEXPAGE">www.ilo.org/dyn/declarations/DECLARATIONWEB/INDEXPAGE</a></td>
<td>The declaration centres around:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• the elimination of forced and compulsory labour</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• the abolition of child labour</td>
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<td>• the elimination of discrimination in the workplace.</td>
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<td>International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ifs/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ifs/index.htm</a></td>
<td>A 90-country alliance working to eradicate child labour by strengthening national capacities to address child labour problems and by creating a worldwide movement to combat it</td>
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<td>Crisis Response and Reconstruction Programme</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/crisis/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/recon/crisis/index.htm</a></td>
<td>A strategic programme that aims to help understand and overcome employment issues arising from natural disasters, armed conflicts, and economic and financial downturns</td>
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<td>Skills, Knowledge and Employability Programme</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/skills/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Promotes greater investment in the training and skills development of men and women to ensure improved and equal access to decent work</td>
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<td>Boosting Employment by Small Enterprise Development (SEED)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/dyn/empent/empent.porttal/J_program=S">www.ilo.org/dyn/empent/empent.porttal/J_program=S</a></td>
<td>Seeks to create more and better jobs by encouraging the development of small businesses</td>
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<td>Global Campaign on Social Security</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/socsec/pol/campagne/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/socsec/pol/campagne/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Treats social security provision as a basic human right and aims to secure it for the entire world’s population</td>
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<td>Safe Work</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/safework/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Provides policy documents, organises actions and offers resources for the promotion of better health and safety at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV and AIDS and the World of Work</td>
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<td>Provides information and advice about HIV/AIDS; campaigns to promote awareness within the workplace and to prevent discrimination against men and women with HIV/AIDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Dialogue, Labour Law and Labour Administration (ILO/DIALOGUE)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/ifpdial/index.htm">www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/ifpdial/index.htm</a></td>
<td>• Strengthens legal frameworks, institutions, machinery and processes of tripartite and bipartite social dialogue and promotes sound industrial relations at enterprise, national, sectoral and sub-regional levels</td>
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<td>• Increases the number of member states that base their labour laws and other employment-related legislation on ILO standards and advice, involving a tripartite consultative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Strengthens labour administrations in their policy-making capacity, responsibility in the implementation of decent work policies and the enforcement of labour law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Assists member states to establish and strengthen labour courts, tribunals and dispute-resolution mechanisms so that individual or collective disputes are dealt with more efficiently, effectively and equitably</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Increases participation of social partners in economic and social policy-making in regional or sub-regional groupings and enhances links with relevant international institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: ILO homepage (ILO, 2003) and individual URLs indicated in the table (consulted 25 May 2004)

Labour internationalism under globalisation – within and beyond the unions

The processes of globalisation that started towards the end of the twentieth century have dramatically transformed the world. A globalising neo-liberalism is responsible for the increasing polarisation of the rich and poor (both between and within countries), for dramatic environmental degradation and for the ’race to the bottom’ within an economic system that causes exploitation and insecurity for workers on a global scale. Neo-liberal ideologies claim that ‘the globalisation of capitalism is an unstoppable juggernaut to which workers can only submit themselves’ (Herod, 2001: 104). The impact on the labour movement has, predictably, been dramatic.

At the end of the twentieth century, international trade unionism was confronted by a tragic paradox. There were more wage–earners than ever before: 2.9 billion according to the World Bank. The ICFU/GDI, with some 150 million members, covered more countries, unions and workers than ever before. This was due, as suggested, to the incorporation of most of the formerly Communist or national–populist unions. But neo-liberal globalisation implied the simultaneous weakening of traditional unionism’s century-old national–industrial base, the shift of that base to countries of the South (particularly China), the undermining of traditional job security and union rights, and the decline or disappearance of support from social–democratic parties, socially–reformist governments and the most powerful interstate agencies. Moreover, the unions were being confronted with a fact that – in their industrial, national or industrial–relations cocoons – they had never previously felt it necessary to face: in this globalising world of labour, only about one in 18 workers wasunionised. Finally, with the disappearance of their
National and international trade union appetues, with their deeply rooted traditions, long-established political and industrial bargaining relationships, and complex internal power dynamics, are both repelled and attracted by the flexibility and spontaneity of alternative modes of intervention in an arena in which unions once claimed exclusive jurisdiction. What were once known as ‘new social movements’ . . . have been able to engage effectively in forms of ‘contentious politics’ . . . which most trade union leaders until very recently considered signs of immaturity . . . . In the third century of trade union internationalism, the challenges which are faced are perhaps greater than ever, but there is growing awareness that old recipes for action are inadequate and that new possibilities can be grasped. Thoughtful trade unionists have come to recognise that playing safe is the most risky strategy. The present is either the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end.

How have the traditional union internationals and the new pro-labour networks been responding recently to globalisation?

The international trade union organisations respond

If the union internationals initially responded in equal measure with disorientation, retreat and (often ineffective) action on a national scale, they are now increasingly raising the old notion of ‘social partnership’ with capital and state from the national to the global level. This has implied a series of specific campaigns, addressed sometimes directly to multinational corporations, sometimes to the international financial institutions and other promoters of globalisation (the WTO, the World Economic Forum, and so forth).

Over the years, the global union federations have established an ongoing social dialogue with a number of multinational enterprises in their sectors or industries (ICFTU, UNI; see also Justice, 2002: 96).

Three major areas of this union work are international labour standards, codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility policies (Jenkins, Pearson and Seyfang, 2002). The Core Labour Rights set out below are currently represented by a set of those already issued by the ILO, of which only one is actually less than 30 years old:

- the right to form trade unions (‘freedom of association’)
- the right to effective collective bargaining between workers and management
- freedom from forced or compulsory labour
- an end to child labour
- freedom from discrimination in the workplace.

This list does not, notably, include an explicit right to the international solidarity strike, as called for by the International Centre for Trade Union Rights (Ewing and Shirley, 2000). Directly or indirectly related to this declaration has been the 15-year-plus campaign, most recently within the WTO, for a ‘social clause’ under which that organisation (initially the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade, its predecessor) would discriminate against states that did not respect international labour rights. This attempt to get labour rights institutionalised by the very organisation that was promoting ‘free trade’ at the cost of labour rights and conditions not only failed but provoked much disagreement, as well as forceful criticism within the union movement in the South and among labour specialists (John and Chemey, 1996; Working USA, 2001).

‘Global Framework Agreements’ between particular GUFs and multinational corporations are another area of union work within the international context (see Box 8.2).

A global framework agreement is a written document between a global or multinational company and a global trade union federation on behalf of its members. The purpose of the agreement is to formalise a relationship between the company and the union at the global level, similar to those common between local businesses and local unions. The agreement focuses on the international activities of the company (especially those affecting its treatment of employees); it negotiates the expectations and responsibilities of both parties and serves to establish a formal and regular channel of communication between them.

Global framework agreements have been established between the International Trade Union Confederation (ITF), the General Union of Workers (GU), the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Union Network International (UNI). The latter groups are both multinational GUFs and GUFs with relevant membership, such as UNI Commerce in Europe. Other agreements have been established with the Carrefour Group, the world’s largest retailer, the ILO, the International Chamber of Commerce, and with the European Commission.

Box 8.2: Global framework agreements between trade unions and multinational companies

A global framework agreement is a written document between a global or multinational company and a global trade union federation on behalf of its members. The purpose of the agreement is to formalise a relationship between the company and the union at the global level, similar to those common between local businesses and local unions. The agreement focuses on the international activities of the company (especially those affecting its treatment of employees); it negotiates the expectations and responsibilities of both parties and serves to establish a formal and regular channel of communication between them.

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CARREFOUR – UNI Union Network International

At the meeting of the Information Committee and the European Committee on Information and Consultation on 27 and 28 November 2000, Carrefour and Union Network International (UNI) agreed that every enterprise needs peace and social consensus in order to develop.

To that end, Carrefour undertakes to monitor jointly with UNI the proper application of ILO conventions 87–98 and 135. Those international standards define:

1. the right of employees to join a trade union of their choice,
2. the right to collective bargaining,
3. the protection of employees and their representatives against any act of discrimination tending to infringe upon trade union freedom.

Respect for union rights and recognition of fundamental rights are part of the corporate culture of the Carrefour Group.

Carrefour has also condemned child labor in order to prevent slavery and forced labor, and it intends to ensure that the principles established by the ILO are respected by its suppliers.

President of Carrefour Daniël BERNARD

General Secretary of UNI Philip JENNINGS

Head of UNI Commerce Jan FURSTENBORG

A global framework can be beneficial to a multinational company for several reasons. As companies are increasingly expected to report on their social activities as ‘good corporate citizens’, a framework agreement is a method of demonstrating commitment that goes beyond mere words. It is a signed document and one that allows for the possibility of monitoring.

Such agreements remain voluntary, but they benefit trade unions and workers by opening communications and providing points of leverage when a company is in violation of the agreement or its practices are questionable. Trade union members, like reporting requirements, can act as monitors. Again, in an era of high-profile scandals and of increasing interest in corporate citizenship, companies do not wish to be seen to be breaking their agreements, which are evidence of the company’s attempts to be responsible. Whether the value of the agreements is limited to the present era and whether the agreements themselves are preventing a push for enforceable international regulation remains to be seen.

Sources and further information: ITF (URL); UNI (URL); Union-Network (URL).
the Global Compact, even though the initiative lacked the power of enforcement or even monitoring, was expressed in a joint UN-ICTU/GU declaration in 2000:

It was agreed that global markets required global rules. The aim should be to enable the benefits of globalisation increasingly to spread to all people by building an effective framework of multilateral rules for a world economy that is being transformed by the globalisation of markets ... the Global Compact should contribute to this process by helping to build social partnerships of business and labour (ICTU, 2000).

More recently, we have seen union co-sponsorship of the ILO’s World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation (also involving prominent politicians, corporate figures and academics), which has published a report on ‘Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities for All’ (ILO, 2004).

Together, these activities suggest the international union movement is refocusing from states and inter-state bodies, seen as the locus of power and regulation, to the multinational corporations, as the new major actors and regulators of the global economy. While the social–democratic international unions broadly welcome such projects (Justice, 2002), others see in these accords an erosion by UN institutions of the multinationals at the expense of civil society (Judge, 2001). Indeed, there is now an ‘Alliance for a Corporate–Free United Nations’ (Infact, 2004), although so far it has not won the support of national or international unions.

While such efforts suggest a reorientation in reaction to globalisation, international trade unions are continuing their historical efforts at union building, in defence of labour rights and in support of workers and unions internationally. Increasingly, this involves new and more assertive language. An exemplar might be the International Transportworkers Federation, whose 2002 Congress was devoted to the theme of ‘Globalising Solidarity’ (ITFW, 2002). A turning point in its practical solidarity is indicated by, on the one hand, its failure to support effectively the Liverpool dock workers during a major lockout in 1995–8 (Waterman, 1997) and its effective support for the Australian dock workers during a related dispute in 1998.

True, much national and international union solidarity is carried out under the rubric of ‘development cooperation’ and financed by the state or interstate organisations. At other times, activity is combined with union-to-union or worker-to-worker solidarity, as with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU, Ulster). It is, however, notable that most of this solidarity activity appears to be on a North–South axis and in a North–South direction. A more holistic and multidirectional notion of labour solidarity is yet to emerge; and even the ICTU website reveals only an implicit recognition of the broader global solidarity movement.

The broader labour and global solidarity movements respond

If the unions were thus responding to the challenge ‘from above’, they were also responding to that ‘from below’ or at least ‘from the side’. For labour’s asserted place as ‘by far and away the most democratic institution in every society and certainly the only major democratic international movement’ (Spooner, 2004: 27) is being increasingly challenged by the ‘new global solidarity movement’, fighting on a broader social and ideological terrain, that of ‘global civil society’. The ‘new social movements’ (ecological, workers’, anti-war, human rights, indigenous peoples’ and so on) have been gathering strength since the 1970s and 1980s, as have numerous international labour networks, concerned with ‘stypical’ workers, with publications or audio-visuals and labour information, and communication technology. Moreover, since the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, there has been an explosion of civil society events, actions, and organisations, such as that represented by the Mumbai WSF (Kaldor, Arheier and Glaucus, 2003; Kaldor, 2003; Pianta and Silva, 2003). These new internationalist labour NGOs, although customarily linked to trade union organisations, differ from them in their origins, ‘membership’ (if any), constituencies, financing, ‘relational form’ (networking rather than institutions), and their typical forms of action and expression. They commonly concentrate on a single campaign, aspect of worker life, type of previously unrepresented labour, world area, and type of international labour solidarity activity (such as education or communication). Sometimes they overlap with community movements. Sometimes they are not even identifiable as ‘labour oriented’ but, rather, take up labour issues as part of a more general set of popular or democratic complaints and demands. A prominent example is international networking between peasants and small farmers (Edelman, 2003). Another is the International Collective in Defence of Fishworkers (Table 8.3; Dietrich and Nayak, 2001). Better-known internationally are those Western-based projects that have

Table 8.3: Sample list of labour-related international NGOs, networks and groups on the Internet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alianza Continental Social/Hemispheric Social Alliance</td>
<td><a href="http://www.asc-hsa.org/castellano/site/home.php">www.asc-hsa.org/castellano/site/home.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia Monitor Resource Centre</td>
<td><a href="http://www.amrc.org.hk/archive.htm">www.amrc.org.hk/archive.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Labour Bulletin (Hong Kong)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.china-labour.org.hk/cls/index.adp">www.china-labour.org.hk/cls/index.adp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Labour Watch (USA)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chinalabourwatch.org">www.chinalabourwatch.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean Clothes Campaign</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cleanclothes.org">www.cleanclothes.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinadora de Centrales del Cono Sur</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cccses.org/index.html">www.cccses.org/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination of Union Centres of the Southern Cone</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cccses.org/index.html">www.cccses.org/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Tradeunions</td>
<td><a href="http://www.e-tradeunions.org/home.php">www.e-tradeunions.org/home.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Labour University</td>
<td><a href="http://www.global-labour-university.de">www.global-labour-university.de</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global March Against Child Labour</td>
<td><a href="http://globalmarch.org/english.php">http://globalmarch.org/english.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Policy Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.globalpolicynetwork.org">www.globalpolicynetwork.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instituto del Mundo de Trabajo/World Institute (Buenos Aires)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mundodeltrabajo.org.ar">www.mundodeltrabajo.org.ar</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Centre for Trade Union Rights</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ictur.labournet.org">www.ictur.labournet.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Collective in Defence of Fishworkers (Chennai, India and Brussels, Belgium)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.icf.net/gpp/english/index.jsp">www.icf.net/gpp/english/index.jsp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Dockworkers Council</td>
<td><a href="http://www.idcdockworkers.org">www.idcdockworkers.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Network of Street Newspapers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.street-papers.org">www.street-papers.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Union of Sex Workers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iuws.org">www.iuws.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Behind the Label</td>
<td><a href="http://www.behindthelabel.org">www.behindthelabel.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Start (UK)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.labourstart.org">www.labourstart.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migrant Rights International</td>
<td><a href="http://www.migrantwatch.org">www.migrantwatch.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Border</td>
<td><a href="http://www.noborder.org/news/index.php">www.noborder.org/news/index.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Sweat (UK)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nosweat.org.uk">www.nosweat.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open World Conference of Workers</td>
<td><a href="http://www.owconf.org/WHC/index.htm">www.owconf.org/WHC/index.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Global Action</td>
<td><a href="http://www.peoplesglobalaction.org">www.peoplesglobalaction.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public World/OAPS</td>
<td><a href="http://www.publicworld.org/index.htm">www.publicworld.org/index.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Latinoamericana de Mujeres Transformando la Economia (Chilean Network of Women Transforming the Economy)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mujer2000.org/rompe/publica.html">www.mujer2000.org/rompe/publica.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shack Dwellers International</td>
<td><a href="http://www.homeless-international.org/standard_1.asp?category=3&amp;id=275&amp;id=262">www.homeless-international.org/standard_1.asp?category=3&amp;id=275&amp;id=262</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Movements World Network</td>
<td><a href="http://www.movimientos.org/home.html">www.movimientos.org/home.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidar</td>
<td><a href="http://www.solidar.org">www.solidar.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetnet International</td>
<td><a href="http://www.streetnet.org.za">www.streetnet.org.za</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Commoner: A Web Journal for Other Values</td>
<td><a href="http://www.commoner.org.uk">www.commoner.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This Tuesday: Longs on Migration, Labour, Transnational Organising</td>
<td><a href="http://www.thistuesday.org">www.thistuesday.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational Conferences: Exchange-Asia (Kajang, Malaysia)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tciaes.org/index.html">www.tciaes.org/index.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Campesina (Peasant Way)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.global-campesina.org/welcome_english.php">www.global-campesina.org/welcome_english.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Community of Social Movements</td>
<td><a href="http://www.movimientos.org">www.movimientos.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women in the Informal Economy: Globalizing and Organizing</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wiego.org/main/">www.wiego.org/main/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Working Worldwide (Manchester, UK)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.population.org.uk/women-ww">www.population.org.uk/women-ww</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Global Strike</td>
<td><a href="http://womenstrike8m.server101.com/english/shortpost-strikereport.htm">http://womenstrike8m.server101.com/english/shortpost-strikereport.htm</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Websites consulted 24 April 2004
addressed themselves energetically and publicly to issues like child labour and sweated labour more generally (Silvey, 2004) and to high-profile attacks on corporations or brands such as McDonald’s (Dhigilani, 2003; McSpotlight, URL). Another widespread type of NGO is that which concentrates on labour rights, often linking unions, academics, students and legal professionals, such as the International Centre for Trade Union Rights in the UK (see Table 8.3 for others).

**Contrasting the responses**

It would be easy to set up a whole series of binary or Manichean oppositions between the old international union organisations and the new labour and social justice movements, and between their responses to globalisation. But perhaps the most significant tensions here are those between the moments of capitalist development at which they appeared; between organisations (representative–democratic membership) and networks (often of self-appointed, often non-worker activists); between the customarily national and frequently cross-national or global constituencies; between ‘political–institutional’ and ‘social–communicational’ internationalism; and between implicit references to a traditional ‘democracy frame’ and references to a growing ‘civil society frame’. However, it is not, in practice, possible to identify such characteristics with the union organisation on the one hand, and the labour NGO or social movement network on the other.

In the 1970s or 1980s some of the earlier international labour NGOs or networks, such as Transnational Information Exchange or Asia Monitor Research Centre, directly challenged the union international organisations from, as it were, ‘below’, ‘the Left’ and ‘the South’ (Waterman, 2001a). They certainly opened up new issues and perspectives for the unions, thus having had, at the very least, the impact of pressure groups or of raisers of consciousness for a new kind of labour internationalism. But neo-liberal globalisation in the 1990s had an impact on networks as well as institutions, and many of the NGOs today limit themselves to roles of support or extension, having abandoned any notion of publicly challenging the international unions, or even of initiating public dialogue with them. Conversely, many unions have been taking up activities (towards women, atypical workers) or attitudes (solidarity discourse, openness to other movements) previously highlighted by the networks. Given, further, the increasing presence of unions on major national or international demonstrations against neo-liberal globalisation, the relationship between the unions and the social movements is becoming not only intertwined but interdependent.

Possibly the most dramatic and visible evidence of what is happening is provided by the World Social Forum, mentioned earlier (see Box 8.3). The WSSF process has been taken to symbolise the new ‘movement of movements’ against and beyond neo-liberal globalisation. It is significant that two Brazilian labour organisations were involved in the Organising Committee (later Secretariat) of the Forums held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, during 2001–3. The first was a ‘new union’, the Central Trade Union Confederation (CUT), itself critical of the ILO (Jakobsen, 2001). The second was the Movement of Landless Rural Workers, an even newer movement, which had its own tensions with CUT and its political arm, the Brazilian Workers’ Party (PT). It is significant, finally, that this new internationalist initiative is firmly based in the South.

### Conceptualisation

When the International Transport Workers Federation talks about ‘global solidarity’, does it have in mind the same idea as when others talk of the ‘global solidarity and justice movement’? When the ICTU talks – as it increasingly does – of ‘global civil society’, is it referring to the same empirical phenomenon or process, the same desired alternative, as is the latest contributor to the Global Civil Society Yearbook? When the ILO talks about ‘social partnership’, is it providing the leadership, or must establish leadership, of ‘global civil society’? This is compatible with anyone else’s notion of the latter? Is its aspiration to be simultaneously a partner in industry and a member of civil society (ICFTU, 2000a) an internally consistent political project or a contradiction in terms? These are far from academic questions awaiting academic answers. They are the kind of issues the international labour movement has debated in conferences and in print during the 200 years of its existence, and which it will need to continue discussing if it wants to have more than a marginal future.

In the history of labour protest and internationalism, such notions as ‘abolition of the wage system’, ‘a fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work’, ‘a socialist world-republic’... problems – also a time of promise, with a worldwide wave of social protest matching or surpassing that of the 1960s–70s.

In giving ‘global civil society’ meaning for working people worldwide, and in giving social depth to this concept itself, it may be necessary to explore other concepts... may have been used, if not fully discussed, above; others not. We propose the following concepts, with footnotes for some useful, relevant or at least provocative resources. The concepts are Work, Solidarity, The Commons, Welfare, Internationalism and Utopia. If these were to be discussed in relationship with ‘global civil society’, interesting possibilities might appear.

### Communication

It was suggested above that the new internationalisms are, in a significant sense, ‘communications internationalisms’. This notion has a range of possible meanings.

Communication can mean that the new internationalisms operate increasingly in social–communicational rather than in political–institutional space – that they work by the spread of information, ideas, son et lumière, dialogue, rather than by occupying positions of (apparent) political influence. This new focus recognises the extent to which powerlessness and empowerment operate culturally.

Characterising the new solidarity movements as communications internationalisms can also mean that they are computer-savvy (in the sense of recognising the low cost, high speed and long reach of information and communication technology) and that unions recognise the need to develop ‘counter-empowering’ power to the use of these means by capital and state. But a communications internationalism can also mean that they are increasingly understanding the subversive or emancipatory potential of a technology that was developed for quite other purposes, and that, combined with the locally rooted, face-to-face activity of the traditional unions, could make a significant contribution to international politics. All communications technology (ICT) could help make people free (Escobar, 1999).

The labour movement originally became international with an acute awareness of the value of communication and culture, including internationally circulated songs, texts, red flags, May Day, and a whole spectrum of international cultural activities. The increasing incorporation of unions into national politics and bloc alliances was so profound that the labour internationalists lost this awareness. They were late, slow and reluctant to appreciate the possibilities of ICT. Under the impact of other social movements, along with the efforts of often marginal labour ICT projects, this backwardness is being increasingly overcome (as witness the websites we...
It was at the WSF4, Mumbai, India, January 2004, that there was the most extensive labour participation, with the high-level involvement of the international trade union bodies (Mathew and Shetty, 2003). As with the WSF3 in Porto Alegre, a World Trade Union Forum was held in Mumbai before the WSF itself began. This was organised jointly by the ETUC, ILO and the WCL in collaboration with the ILO. During the WSF4 itself a range of labour-focused events took place, including 12 seminars, a panel, four meetings, a rally, two conferences, eight workshops, a roundtable and a debate. There was a number of marches, up to 6,000-strong, endorsed by some 40 labour organisations. The efforts of the unions represented a significant proportion of the events held during the WSF4, with the union profile being the highest ever. Many of these were part of the ‘Labour at WSF 2004’ platform, which was coordinated not by a national or international union body, but by the New Delhi-based Centre for Education and Communication, the independent labour NGO that had earlier been responsible for one of the few international labour movement critiques of the ‘Social Clause’ (John and Chenoy, 1996).

Various messages were promoted during these events, and a significant proportion stressed the fundamental role of trade unions in the global social justice movement. Two examples stand out. First, Juan Somavia, director general of the ILO, used the World Trade Union Forum to remind unions of their vital role in struggling for social justice, for the dignity of work and for the rights of workers across the world. Second, speaking to an audience of 8,000, Guy Ryder, general secretary of the ILO, stressed the importance of the ILO and the Global Unions working together for global justice, and the significance of their joint presence at the WSF:

> The trade unions are here, want to be here and have everything to gain from working with civil society who share the same values and visions... The unions are internationalists by instinct and practice.

As well as international activity, a wide range of national and local unions and NGOs, mainly from India, organised smaller events, campaigns, publicity, marches and information stalls. There was, of course, a particular focus on the labour issues that most strongly affect Indian workers: the impact of globalisation and neo-liberalism in undermining the state sector; the devastation of traditional industries; the plight of unorganised workers in the informal sector; the impact of globalisation on the rural poor, child labour and the status of women in the workplace.

Interviews with Indian labour participants suggest a range of motives for participation:

**V Chandra, The New Trade Union Initiative – established in 2002 to coordinate the work of non-party-affiliated unions in India:**

> We decided to attend the forum, to run an information stall and organise several seminars as a part of our development strategy... We have links with trade unions in the USA and South Asia, and for us the World Social Forum is an opportunity to pull together to be able to fight imperialist globalisation and poverty together.

**Jason Periera, International Young Christian Workers – one of many international NGOs focusing on labour issues:**

> We support trade union activities and work on unemployment and migration in India, but we’re also part of a worldwide organisation which allows us to coordinate the things we do much wider... We have come to the World Social Forum for networking opportunities with similar organisations.

**P Suresa, Project Officer – The Dalit Handloom Weavers Welfare Society, a national labour rights group for ‘untouchables’:**

> We offer support to workers and particularly campaign to reduce the high suicide rates among weavers and also [against] poverty. We are at the forum to look for international funding.

**Thomas Sebastian and Sangam Tripathy, International Transport Workers Federation:**

> In India, all the main types of transport have their own union, but together they are part of an international union. They have come to the World Social Forum for two main reasons. Firstly, there have already been three WSFs and there was not much of a labour presence at them, so they are here because they wanted there to be more of a presence as labour is a major part of civil society. The second reason is that their own workers are focused on their own local issues and problems and cannot relate [to or understand how the global problems relate to them. So bringing them here, and reporting back, exposes them to the whole of civil society and helps them to understand how they need to see their struggle as part of a larger one that we have to fight together.
will find shape through a dialogue and dialectic between class, ideological, social–geographical, gender/sexual, ethnic and other differences.

The presence of the trade unions within this new movement of movements implies the hypothetical possibility not only of adding 100–200 million organised workers to the somewhat inchoate and changing constituency of the GJISM, but also of making ‘work’ as central to the WSF as trade, the environment, consumption and peace have been in the past. So far, however, work has appeared within the WSF largely in the guise of ‘Decent Work’, as sponsored originally by an interstate organisation, the ILO. The ILO, the sole interstate institution with unchallenged acceptability to the WSF, incorporated – or even invented – social partnership almost 100 years ago. And, whereas there has been a considerable presence within the WSF of labour’s ‘others’ (female, rural, indigenous, ‘aparticular’, unemployed, migrant labour), and of ‘other’ ideas about work (cooperatives, the solidarity economy, alternative trade), it cannot be said that there is represented here any such holistic alternative to capitalist work, such as that at least implied by Gorz (1999b).

What the new movement does at least make possible is the emancipation of the unions from two historical, and now archaic, notions of labour internationalism: one that the unions, and of the Social Movement (a campaigning unionism seeking mass support). Each of these could have, and often has had, its own internationals and internationalisms. In so far as these are ideal types, we are likely to find, in reality, ambiguous union types and ambiguous internationalisms. It might have been suggested above that union internationalism is today hegemonised by Social Partnership unionism. Yet, in practice, we find varying shades of Social Partnership, Company Unionism and Social Movement Unionism.

The growing presence of international unions within the global justice movement and solidarity movement in general, or the World Social Forum in particular, might suggest a development in the direction of some kind of ‘international social movement unionism’ (Waterman, 2004a: Appendix 1). However, unlike the Community International, neither the WSF nor the GJISM in general has 21 conditions of membership. So the unions enter this new movement without necessarily abandoning their long-standing traditions of Social Partnership and/or Company Unionism. Moreover, neither the WSF nor the GJISM represents some paradise of global solidarity. What they do provide is a new form of international articulation, with ‘articulation’ referring to both joining together and expression.

The new ‘joining together’ is represented by the centralisation of both networking and of the agora – a meeting place of diverse movements and a marketplace of ideas. The new ‘expression’ is largely shaped by such guiding ideas as ‘Another World is Possible’, ‘Alternative Globalisation’, ‘Global Civil Society’, and the notion that, given opposition to neo-liberal globalisation, such ideas

Global justice movement sites may reveal networking with or between national and international labour organisations, but the generalisation of a networking logic within the union movement has a long way to go.

Finally, we need to note the relative absence of quite basic information concerning labour internationalism. Although the drought in international labour studies of the 1990s is being replaced by something like a flood in the new millennium, the new studies tend to be more about union institutions and their interrelations (with each other, with corporations, with states) than about workers and solidarity activities or the movements themselves. Case studies of international solidarity actions are so rare that they tend to be repeatedly reproduced, as if the references or cases speak for themselves and do not require critical examination or reinterpretation. There are few comparative, interpretative and movement-oriented studies, even fewer in the light of the WSF/GJISM (Aguiñac, 2001, is an exception). Nor are there such studies much discussed, disseminated or popularised in a manner that might make them available for activists. Finally, we do not actually know the meaning for workers of the international organisations with which they are affiliated, or the international solidarity campaigns in which they might have been energetically involved. A serious dialogue between labour researchers and commentators, as between these and the activists, has yet to commence.

Political strategy

One can imagine various scenarios for the future of union internationalism. Indeed, we could project these from five possible identities suggested for unionism in Europe (Hyman, 1999). These are those of the guild (of occupational elite), of the Friendly Society (of individualised workers), of the Company Union (a productivity coalition between workers and owners), of the Social Partner (a political trade-off between union and state), and of the Social Movement (a campaigning unionism seeking mass support). Each of these could have, and often has had, its own internationals and internationalisms. In so far as these are ideal types, we are likely to find, in reality, ambiguous union types and ambiguous internationalisms. It might have been suggested above that union internationalism is today hegemonised by Social Partnership unionism. Yet, in practice, we find varying shades of Social Partnership, Company Unionism and Social Movement Unionism.

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What, therefore, seems least likely to occur is some kind of dramatic change of heart – or model – within the international trade union movement. It is difficult to imagine an explicit abandonment of the old social partnership with capital and state for a new one with a global civil society that is still – as all serious commentators add – in the making. Left to its century-old devices, the international trade union organisations are more likely to continue with their present contradictory partnerships – one with capital-and-state, the other with the new movements.

If, however, we address ourselves to the more dynamic party in the relationship, then there is something more to be said. It is this: the new movement needs to supersede the fetichisation of the traditional trade unions, much as it has the state, capital, international relations and political parties (even of the New Left). The new movement already provides space for some expression of that majority of the world’s labour force that is beyond either the unions’ concerns or their present reach. It also has means of communication (including the kind of presence in the mass media that unions once enjoyed). These resources allow it to approach the base of the international trade union movement – people with little knowledge and less control over those who currently speak or act for them. An energetic address to the increasingly globalised workers of the world – with the unions, through the unions, around the unions, even despite the unions – could actually help to reinvent the international labour movement for the century ahead. Those within the unions – from bottom to top – who prefer risk to safety are likely to welcome the challenge.

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PART 3: CHAPTER 8

Rome: Lunaria.


Publicworld (URL) www.publicworld.org (consulted 31 May 2004).


