

Social Emancipation and the New Labor Internationalism: A Southern Perspective

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A politics from below is also possible, a politics that can arrest or divert the tide of globalisation, play off its different tendencies, and invent its new meanings [...]. Globalisation cannot be reduced to an inexorable force; it is also a process in which we participate; it is a process embedded in imaginations we construct. It opens up opportunities as well as closes them down. (Burawoy, 2000: 349)

This chapter analyzes the emergence of a *new* labor internationalism, a “politics from below,” which is, in our view, central to social emancipation. The analysis sheds light on the struggle for social emancipation in this era of globalization through considering a new advance in labor internationalism that contrasts markedly in certain respects with traditional, established forms of international labor organization. This development is the emergence of what we define as a *network* organization of democratic unions in the South that has evolved over the past decade. This initiative presents a fresh perspective on this arena of struggle and the role such a movement may play in challenging the competitive market logic of neoliberal globalization.¹ The growth of this new formation, known as SIGTUR (Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights), represents a significant shift beyond the structures and practice of past labor internationalisms, offering scope for coalitions of counter-power to emerge, thereby contributing towards a movement of social emancipation. This chapter will seek to substantiate this assertion.

SOCIAL EMANCIPATION AND LABOR INTERNATIONALISM

In one sense, social emancipation is inextricably shaped by differing conceptions of the nature of the human person. Our starting point is the notion of

persons as essentially *social beings* (Marx, 1970: 138) in contrast to the liberal market conception of the person as an *economic being*—a priced, calculating, saleable-commodity being, fiercely competing against all other persons, where there is no nexus, no moral relations between persons except naked self-interest. With regard to the latter, the particular form of human emancipation that is implied in the liberal economic model may be summarized thus. Human emancipation is realized when markets are liberated within nations through limiting the role of the state and when free trade is facilitated. This stimulus to competition promotes both economic and human growth. Each person has the opportunity to realize emancipation because these conditions provide the best possible conditions for each to fulfill their individual aspirations. This occurs because market-driven economies reward individualism. The enterprising person is born. A market culture of innovation, intense work and merit secure material and psychological emancipation. Under these conditions there is no need for a *social* emancipation, since society and social relations fade before the dynamic of economically connected, competing individuals excelling through market freedom and the open horizon of opportunity this orientation affords.²

At the dawn of the new millennium, the very notion of a *social* emancipation has been marginalized by this market vision. Discourse on the nature of freedom, equality and community has all but dissolved before this new efficiency discourse. For Francis Fukuyama, this “unabashed victory” of economic liberalism signals “the end of history.” Competitive individualism, the unifying spirit of the age as described above, has displaced political struggle that “called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism.”³ Instead of engaging in a struggle for social emancipation, individuals stretch body, mind and spirit, accepting any sacrifice to secure a new ideal—the noble cause of being *first* in the world, the prize of meeting given global benchmarks.

The dominance of these free market ideas in the mid-nineteenth century gave rise to the first labor internationalism when workers sought to combine to challenge this logic. In the 1860s, leaders of the embryonic labor movement soon recognized that social emancipation required an international component. Local struggles had to connect internationally where the economic dynamic of constantly expanding markets was borderless.⁴ Initial contacts between English and French workers arose because of a common nineteenth-century practice in which lower paid workers from the Continent were imported into England to break strikes. A leader of the London Trades Council proposed “regular and systematic communication between the industrious classes of all countries” as the solution to this practice (Fernbach, 1974). The First International (the International Working Men’s Association-IWMA), formed in this context in 1864, became a vehicle for promoting such contact and communication.

However, in the decades that followed, this promising birth of labor internationalism failed to gain momentum and consolidate. When English building workers took strike action against the employers’ attempt to reduce wages and increase working hours, they recognized that international support from continental workers in France, Germany and Belgium was “a matter of life or death.” Employers’ threats to import strikebreakers swiftly imposed an international awareness (Olle and Schoeller, 1984: 142). However, sectoral struggles against employers intensified the struggle for *national* trade union rights, which were secured in England earlier than in Continental Europe. Olle and Schoeller argue that the disintegration of the First International was not due primarily to political divisions such as arguments over support for the Paris Commune. The *national* recognition and consolidation of unions were of far greater import. This constitution of unions as national entities appeared to diminish rather than strengthen the need for internationalism. When legal recognition was won and as national bargaining systems emerged, the view that problems could be fought and resolved at a national level without reference to the international context dominated.

This shift also reinforced the notion so prevalent in Britain that unions represent workers’ economic interests separate from political movements. Prioritizing the economic over the political confined future developments in trade union internationalism. A “rather feeble” internationalism has permeated ever since (Olle and Schoeller, 1977). This occurred because capitalist accumulation on a global scale produced a differentiated pattern of development, creating competing economic interests. This reinforced a national fracturing of trade union internationalism. Deep political divisions in twentieth-century labor following the creation of Stalin’s Russia brought complicating and tragic divisions to bear on an already fractured movement. US Cold War interventions in Asian labor and elsewhere created divisions that shape today’s labor map.

In the context of this bleak history, analysts have concluded that globalization’s new international division of labor has deepened the nationally based conflict of material interests in a divided international movement (Haworth and Ramsay, 1986; Ramsay, 1999; Olle and Schoeller, 1977; Thompson and Larson, 1978; Press, 1989). The movement of jobs from developed to developing nations where labor was cheap overrode any sense of solidarity, with the workers suffering under these regimes (Olle and Schoeller, 1977). Haworth and Ramsay (1986) noted that “jobs and work lost in one may benefit workers in another.” Hence, there was “no natural affinity between union movements across the developed world/third world divide.”⁵ In such circumstances, workers would see workers in other countries as their main enemy, rather than uniting them to challenge the common source of oppression.

Ramsay (1999: 193) contends that in the early 1970s, fear of MNC strategy led to renewed debate on trade union internationalism. Unions in North

America and Europe were concerned over the capacity of MNCs to move investment and jobs to areas where labor was weaker and cheaper. These corporations had the economic power to "influence governments, withstand labour action and otherwise manipulate their environment" (Ramsay, 1999: 193). This image reinvigorated union attempts to internationalize their dealings with MNCs through multinational collective bargaining (MNCB). Levinson (1971, 1972, 1974), then General Secretary of the International Federation of Chemical and General Workers Unions, argued that the economic and social damage of MNCs had to be countered by the growth of MNCB in order to preserve a democratic balance. Such a strategy would develop unions as "a truly international force" essential for their survival (1972: 141). Levinson's strategy continued to reflect the deep-seated divide between the economic and political spheres. He eschewed the political dimension in favor of an emphasis on the practical economic need for international solidarity identified as the development of MNCB. Levinson's "evolutionary optimism" (Ramsay, 1999: 195) was Eurocentric, drawn from a vision of the evolution of industrial democracy and its extension to the international sphere. In practice, MNCB never made a great deal of headway, apart from some attempts to establish World Works Councils by the International Metal Federation (IMF).

However, despite this somewhat bleak history of failed initiatives, neoliberal globalization and the advent of information-age capitalism has ironically created the opportunity to transcend past constraints. Cold War divisions have all but dissipated. Cyberspace communication systems provide the opportunity to coordinate global campaigns and integrate organization across national boundaries. These changes in objective conditions have created promising ground for a new labor internationalism that may develop the capacity to reassert social as against individual emancipation, and social being in contrast to an instrumental economic being. SIGTUR has seized the opportunity presented by this rapidly changing global reality. This new southern alliance is founded upon a generation of labor leaders who contradict market individualism. Most have paid a high personal price for their commitment to social emancipation, suffering terms of imprisonment and other forms of victimization.⁶ These socially engaged leaders do indeed show energy and daring, contrary to Fukuyama's bold proclamation. They reflect Fromm's (1961: 34) notion of the *productive* in contrast to the market personality, as persons who are "in the process of grasping the world productively," striving to make and transform history through the contribution of their own "creative vitality." Social engagement produces self-realization, a fulfillment of essential social being as these leaders transform a "sense of oppression" within and the negation that this carries into a powerful drive for social emancipation (Plamenatz, 1975: 323).

POLITICAL VISION

This drive for social emancipation prompts an obvious question: precisely what does this mean in the context of workers' movements at this bleak historical moment? In his book *The Worker Movement*, Alain Touraine observes that movements emerge only when a strong *future vision* exists, which inevitably spawns emancipatory hope—a sense that the future can be different. In Europe, Marxism shaped this vision and created this sense of social transformation. Sassoon (1996: 6) shows how the works of Kautsky and Bebel popularized Marxism, attracting the leaders of the working-class movement and the activists who followed them. Theory was condensed into three simple propositions. First, the capitalist system is unfair. Juridical equality between parties disguises a real inequality: the capitalists "cheat" workers by appropriating far more than they pay in wages and other necessary production costs. This appropriation is the source of the disproportionate wealth, power and influence of this class. Second, history proceeds through stages. The present stage is transient. Third, workers are a fundamentally homogeneous class, despite the obvious differences that exist. All workers are united by the struggle to improve their conditions and achieve real, rather than mere formal, equality. To realize this, workers need to organize into political parties and unions that seek to attain these goals.

These propositions proved to be a dynamic and effective mobilizing ideology. They embody a statement about the present—"the existing social order is unfair"; a statement about the future—"the existing social order can be changed"; and finally, a strategic statement about the transition from the present to the realization of a future vision. Belief in these propositions created a *social movement* committed to changing the status quo. What gave the socialist movement in Europe its winning edge over rivals within the working-class movement was the powerful ideas it developed regarding the third proposition—"what is to be done?" The socialist movement came to the fore through the intuitive recognition that the working class represented a social subject "with tremendous political potentialities." Sassoon argues that "[b]y thinking of the working class as a political class, ascribing to it a specific politics and rejecting the vaguer categories ('the poor') of earlier reformers, the pioneers of socialism thus virtually invented the working class." He then makes a vital point:

Those who define, create. Democratic politics, that is, modern mass politics, is a battlefield in which the most important move is that which decides what the battle is about, what the issue is. To be able to define the contending parties, name them and thus establish where the barricades should go up, or where the trenches should be dug, gives one a powerful and at times decisive advantage. This is what all major movements for social change have had to do. (Sassoon, 1996: 7)

Building such a movement was challenging because the proletariat at this time was certainly no homogeneous mass, divided as it was by occupations, skills, territories, nationalism and religion. What was significant was the way in which the socialist movement gave ideological cohesion and an organizational unity to these fragments. "Class consciousness was constructed by political activists, just as nationalism was constructed by nationalists, feminism by feminists, racism by racists" (Sassoon, 1996: 8).

The crisis of the contemporary labor movement is a crisis of future vision. The flowering of an independent, critical Marxism of the 1960s and 1970s appears to have lost momentum before the powerful transformations of globalization and the final collapse of what has been termed "actually existing socialism" in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. The three propositions that were the source of the early movement's dynamism have been substantially modified. Critiques of the present system are ad hoc and piecemeal, lacking in focus. Injustice is no longer related to capitalism as an economic system. Whilst certain union movements have begun to attack the effects of globalization, the underlying logic of this expansionary dynamic is not analyzed. In short, statements about the present lack power and rigor. They have failed to have any significant impact or to attract citizens into their ranks to do serious battle against economic and social change.

This ideological crisis of labor is most apparent when the second and third statements are considered. The notion that "the existing social order can be changed" has given way to a pervasive pessimism that the social order *cannot* be changed in any fundamental sense. Whilst unions remain committed to defending worker rights and conditions, the linkage between these immediate struggles and a longer-term vision that might energize and give coherence and meaning to these short-term goals is absent. The third proposition ("what is to be done?") has given way to the bleak notion that "*nothing* can be done." Globalization, materialized through tariff reduction, financial deregulation and workplace restructuring that has created deep insecurity and personal suffering, is generally viewed as inevitable—a facet of the economic landscape that cannot be altered. Whilst national federations have in varying degrees begun to organize and support acts of resistance against these changes and whilst international union organization has begun to debate new approaches, a coherent *alternative* strategy, grounded in ideology, has yet to be devised. The helplessness of citizens before these forces of change is matched by the absence of an independent labor movement response.

SIGTUR had to struggle to establish itself in the early 1990s, and established interests that wished to isolate the initiative often caricatured its position. However, the new formation was ideally positioned to take advantage of the new opportunities that had emerged, thereby rebuilding vision and hope. SIGTUR's southern constituency, which is located in nations long subordinated within global economic relations, has begun to develop and

sustain such a vision in order to create a *movement* against authoritarian regimes and rapacious corporations. This is best captured in Brazil, South Africa, Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines, with Australian unions being forced into the new mode of operation through the severity of the conservative attack on their right to exist during the 1990s.

This movement would still claim to be fighting for a socialist transformation. However, a maximum and minimum program giving content to social emancipation still needs to be forged. SIGTUR is currently engaged in this process, as is evidenced in the network organization's preparations for its Sixth Congress, in Korea, in November 2001. The challenge that faces the movement's constituents is not dissimilar to the challenge faced by labor movements everywhere. The social emancipation issues embedded in this challenge may be summarized thus.

Globalization (financial and economic deregulation) is consolidating the power of large corporations and accelerating a process of radical rationalization through endless takeovers and mergers.⁷ This is accompanied by a restructuring of work relations within companies and within the state sector. This lean production restructuring (the global "Japanization" of work relations) has intensified labor and created a culture of insecurity as the core of full-time workers is shrunk and casualization expanded. Restructuring has included closings and the relocation of companies from regions where unions are active to authoritarian states where union rights are constrained. Radical rationalization, relocation and lean production have contributed significantly to strengthening the reserve army of the unemployed, further deepening the pervasive sense of insecurity felt by employed workers. The free-trade drive, now more firmly institutionalized through the World Trade Organization, smooths the way for these transformations. All of these changes undermine the power of organized labor, as members are lost in the restructuring and as unions appear impotent before these apparently intractable forces. Logically, hope would appear to be in short supply within this bleak context.

The extraordinary challenge the labor movement faces is how to engage with this logic. How can these interlocking and mutually reinforcing transformations that have consolidated corporate power to an unparalleled degree be resisted? At this point in history, when the power inequalities are so magnified, it is difficult to provide a clear-cut, confident answer to these cardinal questions. At this stage, SIGTUR is attempting to formulate a minimalist program as the first building block in a struggle for social emancipation. This program will attempt clear alternatives with defined strategies in the following spheres:

- lean production, casualization, outsourcing, and the relocation of production to union free zones;
- the privatization of the state sector; and
- the WTO.⁸

As this chapter will show, clarity of an alternative vision in these immediate spheres is only one aspect of the challenge. The other is developing a new form of unionism—global social movement unionism, empowered by network society capitalism that will have the capacity to challenge this logic. What we are arguing here is that social emancipation in the age of globalization has to address what is happening to men and women in the sphere of work relations that labors a minority to the point of exhaustion whilst simultaneously excluding substantial numbers of citizens from access to paid labor. All citizens have the right to a secure means of sustenance and to a sense of meaning and fulfillment through engaging in some form of productive labor. Meaningful participation in economic relations, balanced by time for other cultural and sporting pursuits, is a foundation stone of social emancipation. That is why alternatives to the work restructuring produced by globalization are being vigorously opposed. The reclaiming of lost ground in this sphere will provide the confidence to assert maximalist demands for the development of participatory democracy—a new state form with the capacity to regulate corporations and open the way to socializing control. Both minimalist and maximalist conceptions of social emancipation will remain but a pipe dream unless powerful global labor movements emerge that are allied with other social movements in a continuing struggle to realize these changes.

What are the present conditions that shape the building of this new movement? There is no straightforward answer to this question, as the exact nature of global change is the subject of widely varying interpretations, where each position has implications for the way the prospects of a new labor internationalism are viewed.

BETWEEN OLD AND NEW: INFORMATION AGE CAPITALISM, NETWORK SOCIETY, AND TRADE UNIONISM

Globalization perspectives that have dominated the debate thus far offer little scope to imagine and theorize the emergence of a new labor internationalism that could well play a key role in the coalescence of “a cosmopolitanism from below” (Santos, 1995: ch. 4). Giddens’s 1999 BBC Reith Lectures on globalization and its effects, entitled “The Runaway World,” identified two responses to globalization. The “skeptics” argue that globalization is more ideology than reality. The world is not that different from earlier periods. The nation-state is still a powerful political entity; hence, social and economic issues can still be resolved within these boundaries. The state still has the power to construct a democratic industrial relations system that recognizes and concedes rights to trade unions. What is lacking is “the political will” to “gain extra leverage” in these spheres (Hirst and Thompson, 1996: 17). The clear implication of this perspective is that the current difficulties

workers face can essentially be resolved *nationally*. Hence there is no real need for a new labor internationalism. The second position that Giddens identifies also cuts across arguments for a new orientation by contending that the labor movement itself is being superseded. This second position, labeled “radical,” contends that globalization is not just ideology but represents very real transformations in the world economy and in societies’ basic institutions. Burawoy (2000: 343) observes that, “[w]hereas skeptics argue that there is nothing fundamentally new, the radicals find novelty around every corner.” Nowhere is this more evident than in a major implication of Castells’s argument—globalization crystallizes a new essence. We have indeed entered an entirely new phase of capitalist development where labor internationalism will neither be necessary nor possible. Castells calls this new phase informational capitalism:

At the end of the Twentieth Century, we are living through one of these rare intervals in history. An interval characterized by the transformation of our “material culture” by the works of a new technological paradigm organized around new information technologies. (1996: 29)

This has created what he calls the network society:

Networks are open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network [...]. [N]etworks are appropriate instruments for a capitalist economy, based on innovation, globalisation, and decentralized concentration; for work, workers, and firms based on flexibility and adaptability. (1996: 470)

However, in Castells’s view, the evolution towards a network society does not imply the demise of capitalism. For Castells, unlike Marx, the globalization of the capitalist system does not open up the possibility of a labor-led emancipatory project. In his view, the network society results in labor becoming localized, disaggregated, fragmented, diversified, and divided in its collective identity:

While capitalist relations of production still persist, capital and labour increasingly tend to exist in different spaces and times; the space of flows and the space of places, instant time of computerized networks versus clock time of everyday life. Thus, they live by each other but do not relate to each other as the life of global capital depends less and less on specific labour and more and more on accumulated generic labour, operated by a small brain trust inhabiting the virtual palaces of global networks. (1996: 475)

He concludes:

Under the conditions of the network society capital is globally coordinated, labour is individualized. The struggle between diverse capitalists and miscellaneous working classes is subsumed into the more fundamental opposition between the bare logic of capital flows and the cultural values of human experience. (1996: 476)

Peter Waterman (1999), in an insightful review of Castells's work, highlights a vital conclusion, charged with political consequences. Labor continues to exist, but the labor movement has no transformatory or emancipatory capacity. And for this reason the labor movement has no chapter, or, indeed, existence in Volume II. For Castells,

The labor movement seems to be historically superseded. [...] Labor unions are influential political actors in many countries. [...] Yet [...] the labor movement does not seem fit to generate by itself and from itself a project identity able to reconstruct social control and to rebuild social institutions in the Information Age. Labor militants will undoubtedly be part of new, transformative social dynamics. I am less sure that labor unions will. (1997: 360)

We would concur with Waterman's (1999: 367) conclusion: "Castells writes off the old labor movement too easily." In our view, there is potential for a creative synergy between the old and the new. Indeed, a counterposing of the old and the new embedded in Castells's work is, in our view, likely to undermine social emancipation. We would agree with the proposition that, in and of itself, the new information technology generally individualizes and isolates—so that you have nodes that intersect but that do not necessarily translate into a collective project of social solidarity. SIGTUR provides a way forward because the initiative *combines* traditional union organization with informational age networking. This needs to be explicated.

A — CUT.

B — Congress of South African Trade Unions, COSATU.

C — Center of Indian Trade Unions, CITU; All India Trade Union Center, AITUC.

D — Transport and General Workers Union, Sri Lanka.

E — All Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions, APFTU.

F — Center for Indonesian Workers Struggle, FNPBI.

G — Center for Labor Information, Study and Training, CLIST.

H — Malaysian Congress of Trade Unions, MTUC (certain unions only).

I — Korean Council of Trade Unions, KCTU.

J — KMU Philippines.

K — New Zealand Unions.

As is clearly evident from the above map, SIGTUR is an initiative that is *grounded* in traditional union organization. The new regional structure grew out of an initiative of the Western Australian trade unions (Unions WA), supported by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU).⁹ The initiative was a product of neoliberal globalization. Australian unions were concerned that economic deregulation in a global context where union rights were denied was likely to seriously undermine the prospects for trade unionism more generally. Instead of turning inwards and searching for national protectionist solutions, the Australian unions committed to an internationalized response. They linked with active, democratic unions in Asia, Southern Africa, and, more recently, Latin America in order to establish SIGTUR as a *campaign-orientated network of democratic unions* in the South, committed to resisting the ravages of globalization and to constructing an alternative paradigm of global economic relations.

This establishes a novel combination of the old and the new. On the one hand, SIGTUR is grounded in, and accountable to, the traditional established trade union organizations listed above. In Castells's view, all these organizations "seem to be historically superseded" since they are "dwindling down in much of the world" (1997: 360). They are movements that, in Castells's assessment, do not "seem fit [...] to rebuild social institutions in the Information Age" (1997: 360). Certainly, these organizations reflect many of the problems Castells alludes to. For some, like the ACTU, membership has declined dramatically with the advent of globalization. Others, such as COSATU and the KCTU, are still increasing their base, whilst others, particularly in Southeast Asia, are struggling to establish a new base in a hostile environment. However, notwithstanding these challenges and, in fact, because of globalization pressures, all are committed to SIGTUR.

SIGTUR is built upon the new cyberspace technology. Traditional union organizations in the South are bonded and integrated into the dynamism of networking. All are Internet connected, establishing intersecting nodes as the map indicates. Furthermore, SIGTUR is generating cyberspace campaigning and organization (not just networking) that connects the old and the new in a transformative project of social emancipation. Thus, one the oldest, most traditional of industries—mining—is the focus of SIGTUR's cyberspace campaign for union and environmental rights. Another long-established traditional sector—maritime transport—is the base for forging a global union highly dependent on Internet linkage. Both these initiatives will be detailed in the final section of this chapter. The point being made here is that the new Information Capitalism that Castells analyzes is gradually transforming traditional union organization through the creation of an emancipation-focused, new labor internationalism.¹⁰ In the absence of the new communications systems, this new direction, whilst possible, would certainly not be as effective. Hence, when the new systems are grounded in

labor organization, new potentials emerge. On the other hand, disembodied, individualized networking that abandons labor organization limits the emancipatory potential of cyberspace communication systems.

What is often lost in the infatuation with the new information systems is the question of power dynamics—how established, interconnected social, economic and political power structures can be challenged in reality. In our view, social movements grounded in production organization (unionism) and spanning other civil society movements embracing gender, environment and other critical social issues are vital to this counter-hegemonic venture of social emancipation. There is enormous scope for the new information systems to stimulate, promote and coordinate an action-orientated social movement around key issues. In turn, the rise of social movements has the potential to transform traditional unionism into social movement unionism that aims at establishing an alternative power center. However, a distancing from existing organizations, such as trade unionism, cuts down this prospect.

New informational networking has obvious strengths. In the absence of hierarchy, structure and control, debate is open, action decentralized, flexible and participative. Its weaknesses stem from its socially disembodied character. Networking may generate protest politics, as happened in Seattle. However, to translate these significant and possibly defining moments of protest into effective power politics requires a grounding in established unions and civil society organizations. This linkage is the only way in which a network will be sustained. Formal organizations that are democratic, accountable, committed to social emancipation and open to change allow for a socially embedded networking.¹¹ These organizations also provide a firm financial base to build a new global movement that integrates these two organizational forms—social organization and networking—into a coherent whole that draws on the respective strengths of both.

Such linkage cancels the weakness and builds upon the obvious strengths, as organizations assume network-like features. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the transformation of traditional labor internationalism as captured in the table below.

This still embryonic, new labor internationalism reflects the stirrings of labor movements that are reinventing themselves. In our view, Waterman does not adequately capture these early signs of an entirely new beginning in labor movement history. Indeed, what is missing from Waterman's critique of Castells's pronouncement of demise is a conception of the contradictions that the historical transformations of work have generated and the opportunities as well as the difficulties these created. Just as the destruction of craftwork by machine-based production threatened the old craft worker and craft unionism, so too did it create the basis for a new form of worker organization—industrial unionism—that grew in strength through much of the

Table 10.1 OLD LABOR INTERNATIONALISM V. NEW LABOR INTERNATIONALISM

Old Labor Internationalism	New Labor Internationalism
Hierarchy	Network
Centralization	Decentralization
Command	Participation
Control	Empowerment
Restricted debate	Open debate
Slow decision-making	Quick decision-making
Large bureaucracy	De-layered
Formal	Flexible
Diplomatic orientation	Mobilization orientation
Focus on workplace and trade unions only	Focus on coalition building with new social movements and NGOs
Predominantly North	Predominantly South

past century. Globalized information age capitalism has now created a similar crisis for industrial unionism as the global restructuring of work threatens the traditional union organization of the North. Yet the crisis is opening up the possibility for a new form of union organization—global social movement unionism, committed to social emancipation and the demise of globalization's narrow individualism. SIGTUR is one such instance of this phenomenon, albeit in an early phase of development.

For this reason, we prefer Burawoy's notion of *grounded* globalization as more illuminating than the well-worn debate between the skeptics and the radicals. For Burawoy (2000: 341), grounded globalization is an antidote to skeptics without context and radicals without history. This approach sets out to capture "globalization from below"—the real experiences of those impacted by global change and the ways in which new responses develop. This orientation recognizes that ideology is a central terrain of struggle in this process of resistance. Neoliberalism is now so powerfully rooted in economic and political life that mobilizing against globalization will require a Herculean effort to construct a counter-ideology and crystallize a collective political will for emancipation. We now turn to a more detailed consideration of SIGTUR in order to explore the degree to which such an immense challenge has been embraced by union movements searching for a new strategy.

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF SIGTUR: NEW VULNERABILITIES, NEW SPACE FOR STRUGGLE

As alluded to in the previous section, Western Australian union leaders were concerned about the impact that globalization, in particular tariff reductions, would have on union rights in Australia. There was a sense that a new initiative in the international sphere was a necessary response. Initially, this was poorly formulated as the unions searched for an appropriate strategy. In 1988, the Assistant General Secretary of the Western Australian Trades and Labour Council (WATLC) set up a meeting with the three Universities in Western Australia—the University of Western Australia, Curtin University and Murdoch University—to involve them in developing an appropriate strategy. A sub-committee of academics was formed that met regularly over a two-year period. They planned a large-scale conference of union leaders in the Indian Ocean Region and applied to the ILO for funding. An academic conference agenda was formulated to the point where keynote speakers were even approached. However, ILO funding was not forthcoming and so the conference idea remained dormant.

In late 1988, Rob Lambert, who had been actively involved with the reemergence of a democratic labor movement in South Africa, arrived in Perth, Western Australia. Lambert was approached by Western Australian union leaders and asked if he would assist with this initiative. Drawing on his experience of the innovative and leading role that the labor movement and COSATU in particular had played in the political struggle against the apartheid regime, Lambert suggested that the WATLC jettison the idea of an academic conference. He argued that there was a need for a clear strategy that addressed the problems that were likely to emerge as a result of economic deregulation, the most obvious being the impact of Asia's cheap, non-union labor on Australian union rights. In Lambert's view, the priority should be to establish contact and relationships with genuine, democratic unions in the Asian region that were struggling for recognition. Lambert visited countries in the region during 1989 and 1990 and made contact with these organizations. He found them to be in similar circumstances to those that had pertained during the South African union's long and difficult struggle for recognition during the 1970s and 1980s. The forms of repression were similar. Lambert suggested that the WATLC commit to organizing a small workshop of these unions to explore whether or not there was a possibility of working together on a common strategy against neoliberal globalization.

This *organizing* strategy, in contrast to the earlier academic approach, fell on fertile ground. First, the left unions in Australia had had a long and rich history of an international engagement that was often highly political in character. For example, immediately after the Second World War, dockworkers refused to handle Dutch ships carrying soldiers sent to reestablish

colonial rule in Indonesia. Unions were intensely engaged in the struggle against apartheid, which also involved disrupting shipping schedules. Second, Lambert retained contact with a close friend, Jay Naidoo, then General Secretary of COSATU. This was fortuitous, because Naidoo argued that an internationally non-aligned COSATU should develop a southern alliance of democratic unions so as to more effectively challenge globalization's logic. This meant that COSATU became a strong ally in the venture from the outset, contributing their rich vein of experience to unionists who were facing precisely the same issues that the aspirant South African unions had faced twenty years earlier. To organize and mobilize workers in a situation where no rights exist and where both state and employers are extremely hostile was the cardinal question.

The first small workshop was held in Perth in May 1991. There were twenty-four delegates, evenly divided between Australian participants and those from the region. The latter included leaders from the KMU in the Philippines, the newly established Solidarity trade unions in Indonesia, and independent union activists from Malaysia (including Arokia Dass, recently released from prison), and from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Papua New Guinea. COSATU sent a strong delegation of four senior leaders. Even at this early stage in the process, South African leaders played a key role in sharing experiences of how to build democratic unionism in a hostile environment. They emphasized the importance of developing collective power in the workplace *before* engaging in any form of resistance. Their leaders stressed the need to think and act strategically in identifying organizational space and contradictions that could be exploited. Assessment of organizational strength was critical before organizing strikes or demonstrations. Caution and discipline were deemed essential. This position led to a vigorous debate, as Solidarity indicated that they planned to take mass protest action demanding union rights outside the ILO offices in Jakarta, scheduled for only weeks after the workshop. COSATU and the KMU delegates probed Solidarity's assessment of their organizational strength and the balance of forces in relation to the military regime. The protests went ahead and were predictably followed by widespread repression by the military. Fledgling factory leaders were particularly hard hit.¹² In a sense, this first meeting set a new labor internationalism agenda that aimed at building strong unionism committed to social emancipation under repressive conditions.

This first tentative step was immediately challenged on two interconnected fronts. Despite the Berlin wall crumbling in 1989, Cold War politics lingered. A right-wing national organization in Australia with strong Catholic Church links, the National Civic Council (NCC), which is active in the right wing of the Labor Party and the Australian trade union movement, launched a scathing attack on the initiative in their national magazine, *Social Action*. The NCC made an extraordinary claim in its Autumn 1990 edition:

The initiative for the conference came from the far left of the trade union movement in Western Australia, and appeared to have a distinct WFTU flavour about it.

The Soviet-backed World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) has been anxious to build regional initiatives between unions allied or favourable to it and unions associated with the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU).

Immediately following the first conference, the NCC reiterated its view that the WFTU was the force driving the initiative. They went on to criticize the meeting as "unrepresentative": "The delegates did not necessarily represent recognized trade unions in their respective countries" (*Social Action*, May 1991: 11). This was the focus of the attack on the initiative. Martin Ferguson, then President of the ACTU, also criticized the delegates at the Perth meeting for being unrepresentative. When Ferguson left the meeting, he was vigorously attacked by certain Asian delegates for being, in their view, condescending and racist.¹³

The logic of this position was that the initiative should have aligned with the established unions in the region. However, these unions were all products of American intervention in the region following the Second World War. The establishment of a Communist regime in China led the USA to work actively to encourage the construction of either employer-dominated company unions, as was the case in the Philippines, or unions under state control. These unions were far from representative of the working class in their countries, instead reflecting the interests of authoritarian statism, local economic elites and multinational corporations. The initiative had little option but to search out those in the forefront of the struggle to establish independent and democratic unions that often stood in opposition to the established client unions. In nations such as Indonesia, where military repression against any form of independent unionism was severe, the initiative had no option but to link with NGOs that were organizing in the factories by stealth. A similar situation pertains in China today, and indeed the rebirth of non-racial democratic unionism in the 1970s in South Africa was based in part on the intervention of university students who set up Wages Commissions as a mechanism to organize factories. Democratic unionism cannot simply be invented by the wave of a wand. These new formations are always the product of struggle, hence the criticism that the network was unrepresentative was in fact a call for an abandonment of this commitment to democratic unionism and an acceptance of the status quo—weak, ineffectual unionism throughout the region, representing employer and state interests and not the interests of Asia's severely exploited working class. Despite these attacks—launched at a time when the initiative was fragile and struggling for the right to exist—the determination to work with any

independent and democratic union, regardless of political orientation, remained at the center of the endeavor. This orientation was later formulated into a *Principles for Participation* statement that attempted to flesh out the criteria set out by ILO Conventions 87 and 98.¹⁴

The reason that there was such a fundamental, principled commitment to democratic unionism from the very outset is the Australian unions' seriousness in working towards challenging globalization logic. This would require new forms of international solidarity *action*. Clearly, such action would never be forthcoming from state-sponsored, or employer-dominated, weak, subordinated unionism created as a Cold War stratagem. The notion that the network itself was part of the Cold War logic was a flight of fantasy. As the founding documents show, from the very outset, the goal was to respond creatively and positively to the challenge of globalization:

The idea of a network of democratic unions needs to be seen as an integral and essential component of the restructuring process within Australia itself [...]. The experience of workers in Johannesburg factories, in the scarred shack lands of Manila, in the vast shipyards of South Korea and in the dense cities of India, will be shared on a continuous basis. [...] The response of Australian workers has been positive because they recognize that global issues do connect with their everyday experience in the factories, the mines, the construction sites and the waterfront.

Within Australia we are all too aware of the decisive character of the present decade of global restructuring. How are the Australian unions to compete in a region based on ultra-cheap labour power, secured through severe trade union repression? We can restructure until the cows come home, but we will never hold our ground on existing conditions, while the levels of exploitation in the region are so high. This is the point of convergence between the current agenda of Australian trade unions, and the unions in the region. There is an objective basis to the merging of our interests with their interests. (Lambert, 1990)

The successful launch of the Indian Ocean initiative led to a much larger conference attended by 140 delegates in Perth in November 1992. The base of the network was expanded to include Thailand, Vietnam, Korea and India. The Center of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) had a large delegation that contributed significantly to the debates. COSATU was again strongly represented by nine delegates, led by Zwelinzima Vavi, who was later to become General Secretary of COSATU. At COSATU's instigation, the first formal structures were established at this meeting. They proposed the establishment of a Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC) that was to meet once a year. The denial of trade union rights in the Asian region in particular and strategies to highlight and struggle for these was the focus of debate

at this meeting. Company Codes of Conduct were considered as a possible lever to focus international attention on the plight of Asian workers.

A third meeting of 140 delegates was held in Perth in November 1994. This meeting was dominated in part by the Indonesian question and the fact that ACTU policy on this issue was driven by Ferguson, who led the attempt to engage Indonesia's military unions in the belief that they could be reformed. Ten delegates from Indonesia's struggling democratic unions, spawned and supported by NGOs, were openly hostile to the Australian government's policy of constructive engagement. This conflict almost sunk the initiative as Ferguson threatened to destroy it. He was prevented from this course of action by the ACTU national affiliates who had been involved from the outset.

1995 marked a turning point for the network when the recently elected government in Western Australia intensified its anti-union stance by undermining freedom of association in the workplace through amendments to the Industrial Relations Act. This radicalized the Western Australian union movement and, under the new and dynamic leadership of Secretary Tony Cooke, a militant campaign involving a protest march of over 20,000 workers was launched. Drawing on the network, the WATLC invited COSATU to speak at this rally. Significantly, the COSATU leader, drawing on the solidarity shown by the Fremantle dockers during the anti-apartheid struggle, threatened to reciprocate with boycott action if the laws went ahead. COSATU Senior Vice-President George Nkadimeng presented views that had been developed with COSATU's National Office bearers. He was mandated to commit COSATU not merely to words of encouragement and support. COSATU's engagement would be marked by solidarity *action*, aimed at damaging the Western Australian state:

Solidarity between workers in South Africa and Australia has been clearly demonstrated in the time of apartheid, when Australian workers consistently acted in support of our struggles. Now it is you who are in need of solidarity—the workers of South Africa will not fail you.

COSATU's boycott threats were backed by a similar commitment from CITU in India. Unions participating in the network organized protest action outside Australian Embassies throughout the region. Here was solidarity of historical import, for it was possibly the first time ever that severely exploited workers from developing nations led mass protest action in solidarity with workers' struggles in a developed industrialized nation. Unions in the Philippines spoke of the "parliament of the streets." The statement read at the mass rally in Perth, in August 1995, urged the Australian unions to adopt a new approach to the denial of rights:

In our experience it is not enough to merely lobby in the halls of parliament. We took our issues out into the parliament of the streets, factories and fields, with militant mass actions. We are one with you in the streets of Western Australia.¹⁵

These remarkable responses of SIGTUR unions in the region were not lost on the mainstream financial press. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* carried an article headlined "Role Reversal: State attracts Asian criticism on workers' rights."¹⁶ Rees, the author, commented:

When it comes to dishing out criticism of human rights, Australia is more used to giving than receiving. But a row over proposed labour legislation [...] has reversed the usual roles. Answering calls for support from their Australian counterparts, unionists in several Asian countries have demonstrated against the legislation since it was introduced.

The article took note of the fact that the president of CITU, M. K. Pande, branded the proposed legislation a "ruthless attack on worker rights." In a protest note to the Australian High Commission in New Delhi, Pande stated: "It is to our astonishment that the state government is going all out in its bid to disrupt industrial relations. This will tarnish the image of Australia."

These pressures reinforced the militant local campaign, leading to the Western Australian government's withdrawal of the legislation. This provided a model of the new internationalism wherein the local and the global fuse in a new, more powerful dynamic of resistance that has yet to be fully developed and fully tested. Tony Cooke, leader of the negotiating team, concluded that this linked international action was the key factor in defeating the proposed laws.

These events were of enormous import for the future of this new, fragile network of democratic unions. Key elements of the established international trade union movement, which had been extremely wary and even hostile to the initiative, shifted their position quite dramatically. They had come to realize that the initiative was not about "replaying the Cold War politics of international trade unionism" as the NCC had contended. They recognized that the network, fragile as it was, heralded new forms of resistance against the logic of neoliberal globalization that had no place for the collectivism of unions. They recognized that the orientation was towards building global solidarity, regardless of politics, the only criteria being commitment on the part of participating organizations to ILO Conventions.

Dan Gallin, then general secretary of the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), who had previously been openly hostile to the network, flew to Perth to discuss "coalition building" between the network and the ITS. This was a real breakthrough. Subsequently, Gallin played a constructive role

in developing links between the network and many of the established ITS. These included the International Metal Federation (IMF), the International Chemical, Energy and Mining Federation (ICEM), the Public Sector International (PSI), the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), and the International Transport Federation (ITF). Significantly, these organizations have participated in the RCC.

In the ensuing strategic debates a new emphasis was placed on understanding the restructuring dynamics of industry sectors in order to more effectively ground strategy.¹⁷ This new dimension gained momentum within the network's Fourth Regional Conference hosted by CITU and held in Calcutta, India. The meeting of 260 delegates was a remarkable experience because CITU had mobilized its constituents. Banners and posters lined Calcutta's crowded streets and more than 20,000 workers participated in the opening events. CITU organized factory and community visits that revealed the union federation's social base in West Bengal's working class. The meeting demonstrated the vitality and organizational capacity of a union movement in a developing nation, for it was no mean feat to organize and finance such a large meeting. This was the first meeting outside Australia where the dynamic, style, and procedures were shaped by the Indian leadership. This was a learning curve for many delegations, bringing to the fore the importance of cultural awareness in the construction of a new internationalism. The success of the Indian meeting consolidated the vision of a *Southern* rather than a geographically bound network of democratic unions, where a Southern identity denoted a *political experience* of exploitation and marginalization that arose out of a particular position of subordination in the new global economy. Following the India meeting the campaigns office of the ICFTU in Brussels indicated that the work of SIGTUR meshed with the ICFTU campaign.¹⁸ At an RCC meeting in Perth in March 1999 that included a range of ITSs the initiative's identity was transformed. The Indian Ocean Initiative now became identified as SIGTUR.

The India meeting had another significant impact on the evolution of SIGTUR's strategy. The 1997 workshop-based meeting in Calcutta brought to the fore the devastating effects of downsizing, outsourcing, casualization, and the privatization of state assets on the conditions of the working class across all sectors and all countries. Whilst the workshop outcomes provided a damning indictment of the social and economic impacts of neoliberal globalization, at the time there appeared to be no clear vision on how this restructuring could be effectively resisted. This weakness was addressed at the Fifth Regional meeting, hosted by COSATU in Johannesburg in October 1999. The meeting took a new direction. A limited set of objectives was established prior to the meeting and the focus was on formulating modest, realizable organizing goals and campaign tasks. Before turning to a consideration of these outcomes, a socio-economic profile of participants to

the meeting is presented below, since it provides another insight into the character of this Southern network.

SURVEY RESULTS: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF SIGTUR DELEGATES

There were 121 delegates to the Johannesburg meeting. Trade union delegates were drawn from the following ten countries: South Africa, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea, New Zealand, and Australia. Two NGOs from Hong Kong that were involved with labor in China participated as observers. There were also representatives of some of the key ITS. These included the IMF, ICEM, ITF, and the PSI. Labor researchers from a number of countries (Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Nigeria, South Africa and Australia) also participated as observers. Not surprisingly, the largest delegation came from the host country, South Africa, followed by Australia, India and Korea.

A pilot survey based on a self-administered semi-structured questionnaire was conducted. This was distributed to all trade union delegates (104) at the beginning of the conference. Forty-two returned the questionnaire—a 40 percent response rate. The response rate was roughly proportional to the size of the individual country delegations. The survey results will now be analyzed in the context of this chapter's argument on the new internationalism and the prospects for social emancipation.

Age

Three-quarters of the delegates were over 40. Two were over 70 and only one was under the age of thirty. In this, SIGTUR reflects the age profile of the participant unions. The apparent failure to attract youth into the union movement is a serious impediment in the struggle for social emancipation. The new industrialization of East and Southeast Asia is founded on young people being drawn into the factories. The KCTU in Korea has built its movement on youth and is culturally orientated towards the needs and the style of young people. The issue is on the agenda for the Sixth Congress in Korea and there is a hope that the KCTU could provide some ideas on this critical question. SIGTUR aims to encourage each movement to review its age profile as a prelude to considering its strategy with regard to youth.

The ongoing worldwide demonstrations against globalization and the WTO have had a strong youth constituency. Attracting young people to the struggle for social emancipation is intricately bound to the issue of whether or not unions can regain a sense of vision of an attractive alternative to the present restructuring. As the KCTU has demonstrated, youthful idealism is a key component of serious and sustained resistance. A second weakness in

SIGTUR's profile is the movement's failure to engage women to a greater degree.

Gender

On the face of it, the Fifth Congress reflected a significant gender imbalance. Sixty-nine percent of participants were men and 31 percent women. However, this was the strongest participation of women to date. Positively, some of the delegations, such as those from Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, consisted entirely of women, whilst the Korean and South African delegations had a high proportion of women. Other delegations, such as India and Australia, had very few women. The overall imbalance needs to be viewed in the context of globalization, which has drawn substantial numbers of women into waged labor, particularly in the Asian region where women are severely exploited under the new industrialization. Here the new independent labor movements have a high proportion of women in the movement and in leadership positions. This needs to be reflected in SIGTUR's structures and congresses if the movement is to have any impact on the struggle for social emancipation. Because it is essential that this struggle assumes a global dimension, the language issue is critical.

Language

The Congress reflected a wide range of home languages—there were sixteen in all. These included Afrikaans, Bengali, Bahasa, English, Hindi, Kannada, Korean, Malayalam, Marathi, North Sotho, Sinhala, South Sotho, Tagalog, Tamil, Tswana, Xhosa. Twenty-four percent of those interviewed had English as their home language, although 98 percent had a working knowledge of English. This reflects the trend of English becoming the global language, thereby facilitating new opportunities for transnational discourse, which considerably lightens the task of global movement building. This fact is reflected in the following table.

Table 10.2. ABILITY TO WRITE AND SPEAK ENGLISH

Frequency	Percent	Valid	Percent	Cumulative percent
Very well	23	54.8	54.8	54.8
Fairly well	13	31.0	31.0	85.7
A little	5	11.9	11.9	97.6
Not at all	1	2.4	2.4	100.0
Total	42	100.0	100.0	

However, the diversity of languages in the South should also alert SIGTUR's leadership to the need to recognize this facet. Until now, all the movement's Congresses have been conducted in predominantly English-speaking countries. The test will come at the next Congress in Korea, the first in a non-English-speaking country. Here the contradiction is that SIGTUR is essentially a poor people's movement with minimal financial resources. Holding a Congress in a non-English-speaking country requires simultaneous translation facilities, which are costly. These are indeed the dilemmas of building a global movement in the South. Another critical facet of global movement building is access to and use of the Internet for, as we have argued in the previous section, "SIGTUR is built upon the new cyberspace technology. Traditional union organizations in the South are bonded and integrated into the dynamism of networking."

The use of email

The above statement highlights a core characteristic of SIGTUR, revealing the innovation SIGTUR brings to labor internationalism—cyberspace connection between traditional union organizations, which facilitates global action, thereby empowering traditional union organization. As we have argued, this phenomenon contradicts Castells's assessment that unionism has been "historically superseded," lacking the capacity to "build the new social institutions of the Information Age" (1997: 360).

However, as with all organizational transformations, change is uneven. In the early days of SIGTUR the Internet and the possibility of electronic communication was not yet available. The first real electronic communication took place in late 1996, just before the fourth regional conference in Calcutta. Prior to that, communications were based on the relatively expensive, time-consuming and inefficient use of fax. This was so because the telecommunications systems in many of the developing countries made fax communications unreliable.

The introduction of the Internet into SIGTUR significantly increased the effectiveness of transnational organizing. The impact of the new technology became more apparent during the organization of the fifth conference in South Africa. This is clear from the high proportion of delegates that regularly used email.

Seventy-four percent of the delegates used email, with a total of 50 percent of the sample using it at least once a week. Only 26 percent had never used email. This may reflect a division between senior full-time officials and the ordinary members of the delegations.

Sixty-seven percent of those who used email said that they were able to respond to email messages quickly. Sixty-two percent are able to download and send attachments and have access to the World Wide Web.

Table 10.3. DO YOU USE EMAIL REGULARLY?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Often/once a week	21	50.0	50.2	50.0
Sometimes/once a month	6	14.3	14.3	64.3
Seldom/less than once a month	4	9.5	9.5	73.8
Never	11	26.2	26.2	100.0
Total	42	100.0	100.0	

This survey data demonstrates that a transformation has taken place. The relatively high usage of the new communications technology has the effect of globalizing nation-bound organizations by increasing the level and dynamic of global communications and global action. The new cyberspace communications create this opportunity because they denote a core change in objective conditions. However, such a transformation does not *automatically* lead to new movements emerging. Movements have to be built. SIGTUR is an instance of the political will to build a new global social movement. Whilst the balance of forces is heavily weighted against any form of empowerment and social emancipation from below, as we have shown in an earlier section of this chapter ("Political vision"), the new technologies at least create an opportunity for the marginalized and the powerless to fight back on a scale essential to success—the scale of the global.

This leads us to a consideration of the second part of the survey, which scrutinizes the delegates' perceptions of SIGTUR. This provides a valuable indication of the degree to which this new formation is taking hold within its constituent national unions and the local leaderships' views of the role of such a southern structure.

SIGTUR

A crucial element in the attempt to build a new labor internationalism is leadership continuity. A core of union leaders from a range of countries has participated in every SIGTUR Congress since its inception. They have taken the knocks and ridden out the times where everything seemed to be pitted against the survival of the new formation. These leaders drew on their experience of resistance politics at a national level. Hence they were able to

contribute the organizational skills and the determination to build something new. These leaders recognized that there was no easy road, no group of benefactors, no outside recognition that would point to an easier pathway, but only to new challenges and new obstacles.

A small core could not sustain this effort unless the call to organize and act in new way resonated. Here is where the survey results are interesting. One third of the delegates at the Johannesburg Congress had attended previous Congresses, either in 1991, 1992, 1994 or 1997. Forty-three percent of the delegates in Johannesburg had heard of SIGTUR before 1996. Twenty-two percent heard about it in 1997—these would mostly have been from India. The results reveal that the small leadership core is connected to a wider layer of participation in SIGTUR. This connection has provided a degree of stability essential to the organization's survival during this early formative phase.

Another distinguishing feature of SIGTUR that is captured in the survey is the manner in which these delegates are grounded in, and accountable to, the union organizations that they represent.

Who do you report back to?

All respondents stated that they reported back to the different levels of the trade union movement, either verbally or in writing. One delegation used a digital camera, which gave them the capacity to develop PowerPoint presentations on the meeting. Organizations such as COSATU have a strong culture of accountability and report back in the form of written reports.

This process of reporting back means that the plan for action has the potential to be integrated into local union strategy. SIGTUR is attempting to strengthen this through the establishment of local regional committees that will monitor and assess this process of integration. The new formation does not limit this integration to the national federation level only but is committed to using the new local committees to engage sectoral unions within the federations.

In 1996, SIGTUR began to emphasize the strategic importance of a sectoral focus and has since been working to strengthen this dimension. Hence, the degree of sectoral representation is one indicator of the potential future strength of the network organization, for it is the sectors that will drive the campaigns.

Sector representation

The survey revealed that delegates were drawn from a wide range of economic sectors. A significant number were from the public sector and from manufacturing unions such as metals and electronics, with representation

from telecommunications, construction, transport and food, as well as the professional sector (technical workers and teachers). Despite the achievement of drawing a range of sectors into the process, resourcing still remains a significant problem. SIGTUR does not have the financial capacity to ensure an adequate and balanced representation of all the key sectors, especially in Southeast Asia where the democratic union movement is weak and dependent on outside funding to ensure participation. Sectoral representation has been strong where the unions are well established, for example, in South Africa, Korea, India, and Australia.

Throughout this chapter, we have highlighted and analyzed the emerging role of SIGTUR in the struggle against neoliberal restructuring. Globalization itself shaped the delegates' views on what SIGTUR should be doing and how individual sectors should respond. Whilst the powerful advocates of globalization assert the benefits of free trade and economic restructuring, the views of SIGTUR delegates of these processes were stark indeed. In responding to the following survey question, delegates presented a list of negative impacts. None could see any benefits to working people.

What impact has globalization had on your organization and the workers you represent?

- job loss through retrenchment;
- work intensification;
- job insecurity;
- introduction of casualization and outsourcing;
- deterioration of working conditions and the quality of jobs;
- curtailing of the rights of the union and the undermining of their bargaining power;
- privatization of the public sector;
- decline of union membership; and
- wage freezes.

All the respondents saw the effects of globalization in these negative terms.

Given these impacts, "what is to be done?" In the earlier part of the chapter entitled "Political vision" we observed that the labor movement had appeared to lose a sense of future vision. Confidence and belief that the existing order could be changed had given way to a profound pessimism—*nothing* could be changed. Pessimism is also related to the decline of Marxism as a tool of analysis of the present and of future possibilities.

Is this pessimism and ideological decline reflected in delegates' responses to the following question?

What do you hope to achieve?

Delegates viewed SIGTUR as a network that facilitates, consolidates, and advances the goals of their organization through learning from other countries; gaining information about similar struggles; developing links with other activists and ideas about how to critique and challenge globalization; and building international solidarity. These were the principal hopes of delegates.

Participants were searching for ways of developing "concrete action against globalization" (South African food worker delegate); sharing information on organizing and mobilizing methods and ways to rethink how to strengthen union organization. SIGTUR was viewed as a *means* of building strong local organization and fostering the capacity to resist global restructuring, which was seen to be devastating workers' security and conditions throughout the region.

There was a closely related question in the survey.

How do SIGTUR's goals promote the goals of your organization?

The following were the most common responses to this question. SIGTUR helps: the fight against neoliberalism; the coordination of our strategies; to challenge MNCs; to update workers' struggles, and share information; the unions evaluate organizing; the fight against privatization; to build solidarity; the realization that other countries face the same threats (quite fundamental); to formulate a *common* approach to global issues.

The responses to these two questions reveal that the SIGTUR constituency has not been reduced to inaction through a dark pessimism. The will to organize and resist is present. The logical view that a global attack on labor necessitates a global response is a positive new vision. However, the responses are limited to a search for more effective ways to *resist* globalization. In 1999, SIGTUR had not reached the point of clearly articulating the need to work through a complex process, which not only develops resistance but also searches for *alternatives* to the present form of globalization. That is, SIGTUR is viewed as a forum for resistance. The network organization is not yet viewed as a forum for debating and formulating alternatives to globalization. In the developing struggle against globalization, the source of information is a critical factor. Delegates were asked:

Where do you get information on international events?

Information is gleaned from a range of sources. These include local and international TV such as CNN; local and international radio such as the BBC, newspapers, and journals. Significantly, many delegates mentioned that they gained information from workshops, union discussions, informal discussions,

and email. This seems to suggest that there is an alternative source of information on international activities in those countries where there is a developed labor movement. It is interesting to note that CNN and the BBC were significant sources of information in those developing nations where repression was severe.

Finally, the survey explored delegates' views on the action plan decisions.

Rio Tinto Corporation campaign

The survey revealed overwhelming support for the campaign against the mining MNC Rio Tinto. The responses suggest that SIGTUR is building a group of leaders committed to specific action campaigns. The responses were as follows:

- Twenty-five expressed strong support (60 percent).
- Fifteen expressed some support (36 percent).
- No support, 0.
- No response, 2.

Delegates saw this as an example of the future direction of labor struggles and wanted more information.

Campaign against casualization

- Twenty-seven expressed strong support (64 percent).
- Eleven expressed some support (26 percent).
- Three expressed no support.
- No response from one.

May Day

- Thirty-eight expressed strong support (91 percent).
- Four expressed some support (9 percent).

Establishing global unionism

- Fifteen expressed strong support (36 percent).
- Seventeen expressed some support (41 percent).
- Five expressed no support (12 percent).
- Five no response (12 percent).

The outcomes of the meeting were significant in that they reflected a consolidation of a campaign-orientated labor internationalism.

CYBERSPACE, GLOBAL CAMPAIGNING, AND GLOBAL UNIONISM

The survey results are indicative of strong support for a particular style of internationalism—one that is *action*-orientated. As the above list indicates, workers' *experience* of neoliberal globalization has been negative. Hence, there was an expressed desire for "concrete action against globalization." SIGTUR is viewed as a means to promote this struggle, "build solidarity," "formulate a common approach to global issues," thereby strengthening local organization. As the survey shows, there was a high degree of support for the global campaigns that SIGTUR proposed. There was, however, a degree of confusion as to what precisely was meant by "global unionism," and hence the lower degree of strong support for this strategy.

At the meeting SIGTUR delegates committed to:

- an action plan that included trying to build a common May Day around the issue of jobs;
- campaigning against the anti-union stance of Rio Tinto; and
- building global unionism.

The relative success of these campaigns, even at this early stage, is indicative of the immense potential of *linking* cyberspace communications systems to democratic organization. These signs of the new labor internationalism contradict Castells's notion that the labor movement has been "historically superseded." The labor movement is now in the midst of a difficult and challenging transition from nationally based to globally integrated unionism, a transition now made more feasible by the new communications systems. The transition is dynamized by leaders committed to human emancipation, leaders who still have the capacity to imagine an alternative to the bleak scenario of neoliberal global change. This campaign-orientated labor internationalism will now be briefly explored.

Towards a common May Day

"I have never seen a company create new jobs by restructuring."¹⁹

Delegates were committed to working towards a common May Day throughout the South. This would be trailed in the year 2000 with a view to a more extensive event in 2001. May Day was viewed as an opportunity to highlight the devastation neoliberal globalization has wreaked on job security and conditions. Participant countries that mobilized on this common issue were South Africa, India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Korea, and Western Australia. South Africa, India, and Korea organized a general strike. These actions highlight significant facets of the new labor internationalism. Networks such as SIGTUR do not organize action at the local

national level. These decisions are taken by *national* unions. Appropriately, COSATU, CITU and KCTU were all solely responsible for the general strike decision to highlight the crisis. SIGTUR's role was to utilize cyberspace communication to ensure that all participant unions learned of the actions and recommunicated them to their memberships.

The mass actions were for job security and humane conditions and *against* the effects of economic globalization. This is indicative of a new ideological position being forged in the process of struggle. Again, SIGTUR's role is to capture this shift and to communicate effectively so that individual national movements are not left isolated to face their own power elites who are challenging their loyalty to the nation's well-being. The elites assert that such actions damage the nation's competitive interests, placing investment-driven job creation at risk. Future jobs are at stake as a consequence of these reckless strikes. Grounded cyberspace communications allows a dialogue of common emancipatory interests that dissolves this national perspective. This is an essential counterbalance to the intense elite-defined nationalism.²⁰

Four million workers responded to the general strike call in South Africa, 2 million in India, and 100,000 in Korea. What is distinctive in these mass actions is that, first, organized labor is hesitantly evolving an independent ideological stance; second, far from being a spent force "in the new transformative social dynamics," organized labor is in fact proving to be a *leading* force (Castells, 1997: 360); and third, the labor movement is prepared to take direct *action* to pressure for an end to the liberal economic policies being pursued by political parties in power.

COSATU President Willie Madisha captured these features in a statement on the day of the general strike:

Today's strike does not mark the end of the campaign. Our struggle for full-time, quality jobs goes on. South African workers have never lost a battle and they will not lose this one. This strike is about poverty, joblessness and the greed of capitalism. Unemployment is running at 30 percent and over a million jobs were lost in the past decade. Companies have invested R80 billion outside of South Africa over a four year period from 1994 to 1998. This capital flight must stop immediately.²¹

COSATU made the following demands on the ANC government:

- an end to accelerated tariff reductions;
- a halt to the unilateral restructuring of state-owned enterprises;
- changes to the LRA to make retrenchments a mandatory issue for negotiations with unions; and
- a change in the Insolvency Act to protect workers in the case of company liquidations.

Erica Kessie, a Cape Town textile worker, commented: "We don't accept job losses. We are prepared to do this every month if necessary. If we are not going to fight, then who is going to fight for us?"²² Placards read: "Slash profits not jobs"; "Bosses stop taking money overseas"; "Imported goods destroy jobs."

The strike had wide appeal within South Africa and was non-racial. Afrikaans workers marched chanting "Ons is gatvol" ("We have had a guts full"). A COSATU Deputy Chair for the Pretoria region said in a speech to workers:

We are sick and tired of job losses caused by privatization. Workers are always the first to suffer in privatization. And where does the profit go to? To the bosses who sit right at the top and become fatter and fatter.

Another leader at the same rally said:

I have never seen a company create new jobs by restructuring. We are not unrealistic. Our demands are achievable. We are saying to employers, protect us by giving us permanent jobs.

COSATU committed itself to opposing all restructuring that creates job loss. The general strike was followed by an occupation of government offices.

The CITU-led general strike of over two million workers in India was equally dramatic and defining. CITU issued a statement: "The strike is aimed against the surrender of the country's economic sovereignty before the WTO and the IMF."²³ In West Bengal, air and rail links were disrupted as protesting workers squatted on rail tracks. In New Delhi, strikers held up traffic at a major arterial crossing near the major business district, until they were arrested. The strike was total in the states of Assam, West Bengal, Bihar, Tripura, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, and was partially successful in other states. The mass action affected a wide range of key economic sectors, including steel plants, coal mines, state government offices, banking and insurance and was characterized by strong support from the women's movement and the student movements in these states. The demands in Korea were for a five-day work week; an end to the planned sell-off of Daewoo; and finally, legal protection for workers in atypical jobs.

The global campaign against the Rio Tinto Corporation

This campaign demonstrates another vital dimension of post-Cold War labor internationalism—broad-based coalition building. ICEM is the driving force and has taken the initiative against Rio in probably one of the most effectively organized international campaigns yet. SIGTUR's role is to fully

commit to the ICEM program, thereby striving to contribute to the defeat of Rio's anti-union, anti-environment practices. Success in this instance may well provide a template for action against other MNCs.

Rio Tinto is one of the world's largest private mining corporations, with sixty operations in forty nations.²⁴ The British-dominated MNC has adopted an anti-union stance, demanding total managerial control over production. The company has continuously downsized its workforce, creating serious workload, health and safety and environmental problems for workers and their communities.²⁵ The issue then is how do unions respond? The Construction, Mining, Forestry and Energy Workers Union (CFMEU), one of the most powerful unions in Australia, has been locked in intense struggles at Rio mine sites in an attempt to stave off this attack on conditions. Lengthy, bitterly fought disputes at Rio Tinto's Hunter Valley mine are indicative both of Rio's corporate strategy and of union determination to resist the change. A five-week-long strike was triggered at the Rio Tinto coalmine when the company tried to introduce Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) to the 430 strong workforce, with the intent of realizing more flexible work practices to "get into the twentieth century."²⁶ These included freedom to use contractors, part-time, temporary or casual labor on any work as required; individual performance assessments; the right to allocate overtime at management's discretion rather than through a union seniority list; and finally, the right to hire and fire on "merit" as decided by the company, in place of recruitment from a union list of retrenched miners and retrenchment on a "last on, first off" basis. The company offered a substantial \$10,000 a year pay inducement as well as improvements in superannuation and medical benefits to any who volunteered for individual contracts. All but seven workers refused the contracts, insisting instead on a collective agreement. Despite the union's capacity to mobilize, the leadership recognized that these local struggles had to be linked internationally if the issues were to be resolved, particularly since Rio had the backing of the Conservative Government and their new anti-union, individual contract legislation.

These are the local struggles that led the CFMEU, through ICEM, to go global. The ICEM strategy centered on cyberspace communications. The Rio Global Union Network (RGUN) was formed and is being coordinated out of California. The Internet is being used to promote the campaign, instantaneously communicate union actions and keep track of the corporation's responses. ICEM has demanded of Rio:

- a commitment to core ILO Conventions that protect worker rights;
- negotiation of a *global agreement* giving effect to these principles. Such an agreement must have effective monitoring mechanisms; and
- disputes with workers need to be resolved in light of these principles.

The strategy confirms our arguments on the effectivity of grounded networking. RGUN's first task was to embody the network *within* organization. Two forms were distributed via the Internet. One was directed to unions on Rio sites, and the other to community organizations and individuals willing to commit to the Rio global campaign. These documents are listed in the appendix. With regard to the former, individuals are chosen by the union to be the Rio Tinto Global Campaign work-site organizer. In taking on this position, they accept

- responsibility for communicating with on-site workers about the global campaign;
- to contribute ideas on the planning of the campaign;
- to make sure that all levels of the union organization are aware of the campaign; and
- to work to ensure that every on-site worker has direct access to campaigning activities.

With regard to the involvement of community organizations and individuals, the email document, entitled "Pledge of Solidarity," asks organizations and individuals:

- to send one fax and email a month with a solidarity message;
- to attend campaign activities; and
- to help organize demonstrations.

This new organizational structure within a global network is in the process of being set up. However, the campaign is not delayed whilst organization is developed and refined. Protest action against Rio has been global, intense and sustained. The shareholders of Rio were one target. Union leaders from around the world attended Rio's Annual General Meeting in London on May 10, 2000, having formed the "Coalition of Rio Tinto Shareholders." This was the first time that trade unions had organized a shareholder campaign that was global in scope. The Coalition put forward two resolutions, which called on the company to establish one single Deputy Chairperson to implement core ILO Conventions. At the meeting, union leaders warned that, in the new global economy where cyberspace communications allow for instantaneous communication across the globe, "everything the company does is increasingly subject to public scrutiny—not just in the local community, but across the world. Rio Tinto's performance in Indonesia may well affect its right to operate in Canada or the USA."²⁷

Not unexpectedly, Rio's chairperson, Robert Wilson, dismissed the resolutions as "irrelevant to corporate governance." However, skillful union

organizing is likely to maintain pressure on the Board. The alliance of unions won support for the resolutions from some major institutional shareholders with over sixty-five billion pounds sterling in assets. Apart from this pressure, the alliance led by ICEM began to organize protest actions around the globe, in an effort to pressurize Rio into signing a global agreement. Whilst these are still at an early stage, there is potential for a campaign of rolling protest actions across the globe until the company agrees to negotiate a global agreement.

SIGTUR is committed to mobilizing unions in the South against Rio. Pakistani workers have marched through central Islamabad. They tried to reach the British Embassy to protest but were blocked by military police. The All Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions was joined by the Working Women's Organization, mobilizing men and women workers from a range of sectors, including telecommunications, water and power, the garment industry, railway, food, and leather, as well as nurses, teachers, and pharmaceutical workers. Leaders spoke of the international solidarity that the campaign expressed and called on Rio to meet ICEM's demands. They demanded an end to the violence against workers in Brazil. In California, chemical workers demonstrated against Rio, and in Indonesia workers occupied the mine site, asserting their rights. The emancipatory potential of cyberspace networking linked to organizations is already apparent in these early actions. The commitment of workers beyond their immediate interests belies competitive individualism and the determinism of much of the analysis arguing that there is an irreconcilable conflict of interests between workers in developed and developing nations.

Building global unionism

In Johannesburg, the MUA and the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) signed a declaration of intent to create a global union. Such a union would link the ports of Fremantle in Western Australia with South Africa's east coast port of Durban. Such a linkage is symbolic. History resonates. During the apartheid years, Fremantle waterfront workers often delayed South African shipping in protest against the regime. Ship owners were forced to refurbish the cabins of black seamen before the ships were offloaded. More recently, the South African transport unions came out in solidarity with Australian workers fighting against the imposition of anti-union laws. In 1995, the unions threatened a boycott of Australian shipping on route from Fremantle to Durban unless the Western Australian laws were withdrawn. The Western Australian government retreated, on the understanding that the boycotts would be cancelled.²⁸ When a new version of the laws was reintroduced in 1997, dockworkers in all South Africa's major ports withdrew their labor for a day and marched to the city centers in protest

against the renewed attack on Australian unions. Large numbers participated in the Durban marches, holding aloft banners proclaiming their commitment to Australian workers who had stood by them in their fight against apartheid. During the 1998 maritime dispute, shipping was actually boycotted. In early May, Australian ships were stranded with unloaded cargo. Significant lessons were drawn from this experience. Global integration and the trade dependence of nations renders governments vulnerable to militant, global union action. In 1995, the Western Australian government was determined to press ahead with its anti-union agenda, yet they eventually retreated before these pressures. A sensible strategy therefore requires that the global unionism experiment should first be applied to this strategic sector. Hence the statement of intent:

The challenge for the two unions is to consolidate and build the foundation for international unionism on an ongoing basis. Workers cannot be called into action if they know little about the history, culture and current challenges of workers in other nations. These understandings and consciousness have to be built. Organisation has to develop to foster this new internationalism.

The leaderships here present commit to advancing the process of linking the ports of Fremantle in Western Australia and Durban in South Africa organisationally. We commit to advancing this idea through our respective democratic structures.

We commit to calling for the establishment of the necessary sub-committees to examine the practical implications of linking these ports organisationally.²⁹

Since the SIGTUR Congress, implementing this agreement has progressed. The statement of intent was endorsed at the November 1999 National Conference of the MUA, which is the union's policymaking body. A MUA delegate attended a SATAWU meeting in May.

It was agreed that we would exchange two delegates and the countries would host those delegates for a month. We established that in order that the visiting delegates appreciate fully the cultural differences of the sister port as well as the political and industrial environment, the delegates should stay with families of workers in that port.³⁰

If SIGTUR can succeed in this modest first step, it may provide something of a general route map of where unions should aim in the twenty-first century. The following action typology summarizes the general direction of the new labor internationalism.

Table 10.4. TYPOLOGY OF THE ACTIONS OF THE NEW INTERNATIONALISM.

Type of international activity	Resolutions	Activity	Coalition partners	Objective	Outcome
Demonstration of collective power; raising demands	May Day resolution	May Day focus on jobs	National trade union formations	Develop a common consciousness and working-class identity in the South	Successful demonstrations in SA, Korea, India, Indonesia, Australia
Protest action; pressure politics	Campaign against Rio Tinto	Intervention at shareholders meeting, street marches, protests, media campaign	ITSCEM, national trade unions, NGOs, green groups	Global collective bargaining agreement	Successful protests and strikes in different parts of the world
Building new global structures	Global unionism	Exchange of information between SATAWU and MUA	National unions SATAWU, MUA, ITS	Establish close structured relations between two unions, transcending national boundaries	Support action, exchange of delegates
Building a new form of unionism	Organizing casual workers	Recruit and bargain on behalf casuals	Trade union formations; community organizations	New form of social movement unionism	Little progress

The challenges facing SIGTUR

SIGTUR is at the crossroads. It is a remarkable achievement to have survived for a decade, given the initial hostility and scarcity of resources. The initiative provides a starting point for debate on the new labor internationalism because it is innovative, having grasped the potential of electronic networking in the age of globalization. SIGTUR challenges Castells's argument that the new network stage of capitalism presages the demise of unionism and solidarity, as social relations are individualized. The SIGTUR experiences reveal that social commitment has not been eroded by competitive individualism. In fact, quite the opposite is occurring. The lives of working people have been so damaged that they are willing to act collectively. SIGTUR's campaigns are testimony to this, as are the new protest movements that emerged in Seattle, Washington, and Melbourne. Castells's argument requires significant qualification. SIGTUR also demonstrates the critical need to link networks to organization.

Despite these advances, SIGTUR remains very fragile and dependent on the commitment of a few individuals. In the long run this is not sustainable. SIGTUR has to move from its present network form to a new modality that more effectively combines the strengths of a network with the strengths of organization, which can assure accountability and a secure financial base. There are two fundamental reasons why SIGTUR has endured. First, the initiative has survived a decade because of the sheer political will of the unions involved. Second, the experience of harsh and repressive regimes in the South has created a need for such a structure. SIGTUR faces four central challenges:

—The organizational capacities of the unions in the network are uneven. Southeast Asia in particular is marked by weak democratic unionism. The difference in capacity is most evident in the uneven use of email *within* national unions. This unevenness is accentuated by different national political traditions. How to overcome this unevenness and build a common project is the challenge facing SIGTUR.

—The second challenge is to persuade the stronger national federations to devote more resources to the network. This raises the obvious continuing tension between the level of priority given to the national as against international interests. SIGTUR assumes that there is no longer a national interest separate in the long term from an international interest. Globalization has inextricably linked the two. The challenge for SIGTUR is to create a genuinely global movement that empowers local struggles through linking globally in a new form of transnational union organization.

—The third challenge is to broaden the support base of unions to include those in casual work, those in part-time work and the informal sector. This requires a very different organizational form to that which exists at present. Unions have to broaden, deepening the sense of class transformations whilst being sensitive to a range of non-class identities. This may require the formation of structured coalitions with other social movements around gender, the environment and other issues. In so doing the new broad-based unionism places itself at the forefront of the struggle for social justice.

—A final, and quite fundamental, challenge is to find a way of relating effectively to the current international trade union institutions, in particular the ICFTU and the ITSs. We have suggested that the new labor internationalism is a network organization that has a mobilization orientation. Is the relationship to be a competitive one, or is it to be complementary?

The revitalization of labor internationalism is a common goal shared with progressive labor movements all over the globe. The task is to continue to build SIGTUR as an *enduring* force. The initiative is still a fragile structure that has been sustained for a decade by sheer political will and determination. The successes achieved in this decade would not have been possible had this will not been nurtured in the fertile soil of resistance generated by neoliberal globalization. To remain sustainable it will have to meet the four challenges identified in this chapter. This will demand a high level of innovation. The fact that so much has been achieved within a short space of time gives cause for cautious optimism as far as the future is concerned.

Notes

- 1 "South" is defined *politically* and not geographically. That is, SIGTUR is one initiative to bring together some of the world's most exploited working classes, many of whom are denied basic ILO-defined trade union rights and find themselves in restricted political situations.
- 2 This is captured in Margaret Thatcher's oft-quoted statement, "There is no such thing as society."
- 3 Francis Fukuyama, "Have We Reached the End of History?" an article based on a lecture he presented at the University of Chicago's John M. Olin Center for Inquiry into the Theory and Practice of Democracy (February 1989).
- 4 The birth of worker internationalism was nurtured in fragile circumstances. Initially, the London Trades Council, which was formed in 1860, drew together the skilled, relatively privileged working class rather than the broad mass of English workers. They established links with French workers whose movement had been inhibited by the repression of the

Bonapartist regime and the defeats of 1848.

- 5 These quotations are taken from a print of the paper in Waterman (1984: 63, 81).
- 6 For example, Malaysian union leader Arokia Dass has suffered greatly at the hands of Mahthir's government. Dass has played a key role in building SIGTUR from the outset and is a member of the SIGTUR Regional Coordinating Committee. He was detained under Malaysia's Internal Security Act between 1987 and 1989. He was psychologically tortured during this entire period. He was blindfolded and moved to different prisons up to three times a week. On his release, Dass was disorientated. Friends felt he would never again become active. However, he has remained as committed as ever and has made a major contribution to building a new internationalism. Dita Sari, a leader of the independent unions in Indonesia, was imprisoned for three years under Suharto. She campaigned against prison conditions, organizing other prisoners and, not surprisingly, found herself placed in isolation. At the time of this writing, eight Korean unionists were in prison.
- 7 On this consolidation of corporate power and its political implications, see, for example, the recent book by Noreena Hertz (2001), *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy* (Heinemann).
- 8 Working out alternatives in these key spheres was the focus of SIGTUR's Sixth Congress in Korea in November 2001.
- 9 Unions WA is a state branch of the national federation, the ACTU. Unions WA was previously named the Trades and Labour Council of Western Australia (WATLC).
- 10 The case should not be overstated. Unionism that has become institutionalized does not change, except by a long process of internal struggle marked by contradictions and competing tendencies.
- 11 Hence from the outset, SIGTUR only linked with grassroots democratic unions, committed to social emancipation. The policy document *Principles for Participation* stated that only those organizations that reflected ILO Conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98 (collective bargaining rights) were allowed to participate.
- 12 Lambert visited Indonesia on a number of occasions between 1990 and 1995. He found that a wide range of Solidarity factory leaders had been victimized as a result of the protest action. Leaders lost their jobs after lengthy interrogation by the military.
- 13 The conflictual exchange is significant in that it reveals much about the challenge of building a new labour internationalism. Ferguson, a leading figure in the Labor Party's left faction, is undoubtedly committed to non-racialism. However, his assertions at this meeting were interpreted as racist in that many of the delegates who were struggling to establish new unions under conditions of extreme repression felt that he ridiculed their efforts.

This serves to highlight the vital importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for openness in exploring other national realities.

- 14 At a Regional Coordinating Committee meeting (RCC) of SIGTUR's predecessor, the Indian Ocean Initiative, a document, *Principles for Participation*, was formally endorsed on 2 August 1996 in Johannesburg. These principles were the outcome of two years of intense debate. Essentially, the document states that the initiative will only work with those organizations that conformed to ILO Conventions 87 (freedom of association), 98 (collective bargaining) and 151 (public employees). The document went on to state that this should be reflected in "organisational structures and practices." This was carefully defined in *Principle Two*, which stated:

Unions which are established by the state or are part of the state which seek to control workers in the interests of capital and the state cannot be part of the initiative. Furthermore, unions which are established with the assistance of employers and are dominated by employers should be excluded.

Principle Three asserted that "This initiative will include independent unions, which are active at the grassroots level in organising and representing the interests of the working class." Time and resources were not going to be expended on those organizations that were inactive and ineffectual.

The adoption of *Principle Four* was crucial to ensuring the broadest possible resistance base: "This initiative will not exclude or include unions/federations solely on the basis of their political and ideological orientation, or their tactical and strategic goals within their countries, which aim to further the interests of the working class."

The document concluded: "To the extent that we achieve a principled and broad-based, inclusive orientation, we will become a forum for intense, creative debate on working-class interests. In an era when the powerful forces of global capital and finance capital, represented by international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, are ranged against the working-class movement, such an approach is of paramount importance. We must be a catalyst for dialogue and debate, as well as strategic initiatives aimed at the protection and renewal of the working-class movement."

- 15 Message to the mass rally by KMU, 11 Aug. 1995.
 16 *Far Eastern Economic Review* (19 Oct. 1995: 23).
 17 Tony Cooke, Secretary of Unions WA, must take much of the credit for emphasizing the need for a strong sectoral focus. He has Chaired the Unions WA International Committee for the past six years and has been responsible for maintaining Unions WA's strong commitment to a new southern regionalism. Given his status in the national movement, he has also played a key role in consolidating SIGTUR as a key feature of ACTU strategy.

- 18 Lambert had a constructive meeting with Tim Noonan, the ICFTU campaign coordinator in Brussels in Jan. 1998.
 19 COSATU email communication with the SIGTUR Coordinating Center, May 2000 (unnamed union leader at the Pretoria rally).
 20 There is an obvious irony. Corporate leadership and the political parties that support their agenda strive to weaken the social resolve and civil commitment of the nation-state, while at the same time calling on the working class and their organizations not to undermine the nation-state through a failure to commit to global competitive restructuring, which itself erodes the economic capacity of the nation-state.
 21 COSATU email communication received by SIGTUR Coordinating Center, May 2000.
 22 Ibid.
 23 CITU email communication to the SIGTUR Coordinating Center.
 24 The company focuses on large, long-term, low-cost mining and mineral processing operations in aluminium, copper, energy (coal, uranium), gold, industrial minerals and iron ore.
 25 Rio Tinto Global Campaign Fact Sheet, produced by the Rio Tinto Global Union Network, formed by ICEM with its coordinating center in California (email address: tconrow@igc.org).
 26 *The Australian*, 18 July 1997.
 27 Speech by Tony Maher, President of CFMEU, Mining Division to Rio Shareholders Meeting, 10 May 2000 (ICEM communiqué, circulated through RGUN).
 28 For an account of this remarkable experience, see Lambert in *International Labour Reports*, 3(2), 1996: 6.
 29 See SIGTUR Action Plan, 1999.
 30 Report of MUA leader Dean Summers, May 2000.

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