

Emancipating Labor Internationalism

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INTRODUCTION

Internationally, increasing numbers of specialists on labor seem to be recognizing that, with globalization, a single world of labor is at last coming into—admittedly uneven and problematic—existence (see Breitenfellner, 1997; Munck, 2002; O'Brien, 2000a, 2000b; Waterman, 1998). This does not necessarily imply that they understand a new labor internationalism as going beyond capitalism, either in theory or in practice. However, the project on “Reinventing Social Emancipation” (RSE), of which this volume is part, explicitly connects the notion of a New Labor Internationalism (NLI) with that of emancipation. Which is, after all, where the idea of labor internationalism began in one small part of the contemporary world, almost two hundred years ago.¹

FOUR EMANCIPATIONS ... AND ONE INTERNATIONALISM

The RSE project does not, surprisingly, offer a *definition* of social emancipation. It offers, rather, an understanding based on the articulation of the following elements: participatory democracy; alternative production systems; emancipatory multiculturalism, justices, and citizenships; biodiversity, rival knowledges and intellectual property rights; and a new labor internationalism.

We can reduce the four initial themes to this: the attempt to develop a post-capitalist and post-liberal (even post-socialist) understanding of Democracy, Production, Rights and Knowledge. I stress an *understanding*, rather than a condition or state (or State)—such as original understandings of Socialism, Communism or Utopia. Perhaps what is being proposed here is a change of *direction*, in which the destination is neither prescribed in advance, nor even known, but is to be discovered with our fellow travelers

whilst walking and talking. RSE articulates these four themes not with internationalism or solidarity in general but with a new kind of labor internationalism in particular. It must be said here that this articulation is unique. For insofar as there is a contemporary literature articulating emancipation with internationalism, it tends to be with some new cosmopolitanism, some new form of global governance or with some modest notion of “transborder” or “transnational” politics (Eschle, 2001: ch. 5), rather than with a new labor internationalism in particular. The RSE theme on labor internationalism is specified, in part, thus:

As is well known, labor internationalism was one of the most blatantly unfulfilled predictions of *The Communist Manifesto*. Capital globalized itself, not the labor movement. [...]

In the post-cold-war period and as a response to the more aggressive bouts of hegemonic globalization, new as yet very precarious forms of labor internationalism have emerged. [...]

Even more frontally than alternative production systems, the new labor internationalism confronts the logic of global capitalism on its own privileged ground: the market economy. The success of the new labor internationalism is dependent upon the “extra-economic” linkages it will be able to build with the social initiatives and movements within the ambit of any of the other themes dealt with in this project.²

Now, I am not at all sure whether the articulation of the four with labor internationalism in particular serves *them* best, since each implies its own internationalism(s). In so far, however, as a new labor internationalism is understood as one amongst many internationals and internationalisms (concerned with democracy, alternative production/consumption, of rights, of knowledge) then RSE represents a challenge to re-articulate the original Marxist trinity, Labor-Internationalism-Emancipation, in a manner appropriate for, against and beyond a globalized networked capitalist (dis)order. Indeed, this is the theoretical task undertaken by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and César Rodríguez-Garavito in the introduction to this volume, in which they explicitly seek to articulate struggles for alternative forms of production with struggles for labor internationalism.

FOUR NEW LABOR INTERNATIONALISMS: A CRITIQUE

So much for generalities. Space considerations alone rule out detailed and equal attention to the four labor case studies included in this volume. It also precludes a detailed discussion of Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito's general theoretical chapter and on Hermes Costa's analysis of some core issues and literature on labor internationalism. I will deal with two of the

case studies in this section and reserve two for separate treatment in the next section.

Francisco de Oliveira: "Who Is Singing *L'Internationale* Again? A Brazilian Illustration." Although apparently addressed to the international and inter-nationalism, this chapter is primarily concerned with the past and present of the Brazilian trade union movement, particularly the long-central metal-working/autoworkers unions, and particularly the process of struggle/negotiation with the state and employers as Brazilian industry reels under the violent effects of neoliberalism on a world scale. Oliveira does, however, devote several pages to the past and present of Brazilian and autoworker internationalism. He identifies three phases: 1) the anarcho-sindicalist internationalism of the first generation of workers, brought to Southern Brazil by immigrants from Southern Europe; 2) the party internationalism of the Communists in the 1920s-30s, later opposed by US efforts at a pro-capitalist internationalism (both of these were marginal to the national-populist unionism of dictator Getúlio Vargas); 3) a factory-worker internationalism that began under the military dictatorship, as Brazil became a major metal/motor manufacturer, and counterpart unions—particularly in Europe—became interested in the increasingly militant unionism of the São Paulo ABC region.

Oliveira argues that whilst in the period of "peripheral Fordism" (1950s-1980s) there was a certain interest and support from Europe, sometimes from labor-oriented NGOs, the European unions organizing Fiat, Volvo, and Volkswagen workers made little if any impact on these companies in their home countries. He notes the beginning of a new direction (a fourth period?), in which diverse phenomena are appearing. The first is that of the internationalism of workers within the same company, under the impact of privatization and foreign takeovers (for example, Spanish-Brazilian bank worker internationalism). The second is the increasing relationship of North American and other unionism with the anti-globalization movement. Oliveira proposes that these latter movements have to be understood in terms of "citizenship and survival" rather than in terms of the common material interests of industrial workers. While the latter kind of internationalism can be found in the development of Mercosur unionism, such efforts "are weak in terms of counter-hegemonic projects."

Reflecting further on the history of labor internationals and internationalism, Oliveira criticizes both revolutionary and reformist theorists and proponents for failing to recognize that national working classes are made, or make themselves, in ways that differ according to traditions, relations with capital and state, religion, ethnic and even moral identities. He also questions whether the current radicalization of labor in the abstract can—given such continuing differences between countries and regions—provide a base "for the action of this supposedly universal working class." He considers, rather,

that what is common to workers in general is their increasing exclusion and the attempt to make their organizations superfluous. It is this grim international scenario that leads Oliveira back to his main subject, the attempt of the metalworkers unions based in São Bernardo (the B of the São Paulo ABC region) to impose a national metalworkers' contract that challenges the casualization, "greenfields" and anti-union efforts of the major auto manufacturers within Brazil.

In his reflections on his subject, Oliveira draws on Gramsci and Critical Sociology, as well as on labor historian Edward Thompson, and on contemporary radical-democratic theorists of democracy and globalization.

Roberto Vêras: "Metalworkers, the 'Strike Festival' and the Possibilities of a National Contract." This is another chapter focused on the industrial and national struggles of Brazilian auto/metalworkers, and concerned with their efforts to reassert themselves nationally in the face of a neoliberal globalization that has profoundly changed the socio-political weight of the industrialized and unionized working class in that country. Vêras concentrates on the mobilization of workers for a national-level collective contract for the auto sector in Brazil (see Oliveira above). He refers to the attempts to develop a union presence within Mercosur and union activity in relation to the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA, see Mello e Silva above). He also mentions the activities of the CUT to create new alliances at local, national and international levels. The CUT has been active in relation to the environment, children's rights, citizenship and education, and against the neoliberalism of the Cardoso government. Vêras's chapter is of a less theoretical or speculative nature than Oliveira's, drawing on the literature of labor relations and unionism, relating either to Brazil in particular or Latin America more generally.

In commenting on these and the other chapters on labor, I want to refer back to the RSE Project. In so far as RSE suggests that emancipation springs out of the articulation of new forms of Democracy, Production, Citizenship and Knowledge with a New Labor Internationalism, then the project seems to me to represent something of a challenge to most of the labor movements and labor studies with which we are here confronted.

The case studies reveal the unions as either defenders of worker and democratic rights under neoliberal or global attack, or as proponents of a deeper or more extended democracy. The attachment to *democracy*, the attention to *citizenship*, the extension of those addressed from union members to *working people, women, children, and others*—all these are new, notable and valuable. In many cases, however, what the unions are trying to establish is a meaningful liberal democracy in situations where this does not yet exist. Given the multiple shortcomings of liberal democracy, as revealed most recently by its globalized war against Afghanistan, this is a utopia turning into a dystopia: islands of political democracy in oceans of social fascism (Santos, 2002). Even

where the talk is of "counter-hegemony," this is mostly in recognition of its non-achievement. And, even where it is seen as being achieved, such "counter-hegemony" does not seem to amount to either the old socialism, or a post-capitalist political alternative—nor even the old union utopia of the welfare state! The issue of "international," "cosmopolitan," or "global" democracy hardly arises here. Moreover, the extension or transformation of democracy *within* the trade unions is hardly (if at all) mentioned, though this has been recognized as *the* problem of unionism ever since the classical formulation of the "iron law of oligarchy" early in the last century (Michels, 1915).

In relation to *production*, most of the case studies go little further than a concern with the issues of, first, employment, second, public ownership, and, third, some uncertain kind of national or regional autonomy from a) the global market, b) rapacious multinationals and c) authoritarian international financial institutions. These are defensive postures and, as such, an essential and unavoidable base for anything more assertive. But the studies do not envision, far less propose, inter/national relations of production, distribution, exchange and consumption that might challenge the hegemonic forms and discourses. These issues, however, are explicitly taken up in the introductory chapter by Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito. Indeed, theirs is an effort to connect theories and practices of alternative production and labor internationalism as embodied in the chapters of this volume and other empirical and theoretical studies.

The question of *citizenship* is raised by some of the case studies and by Costa's review of the core issues on labor internationalism. The reassertion that the labor movement is a citizenship movement (and the suggestion that citizenship theory is relevant to union strategy) is a welcome rediscovery and claim (Johnston, 1999). There is also the occasional suggestion that a regional/international union power or identity could reinforce (and/or re-empower?) national ones. But no major issue is made of women's, indigenous or ethnic minority identities and rights, even where these are significant within the democratic movements of the countries concerned.

It is no surprise that *knowledge* sources, rights or claims should remain unaddressed in these case studies, given that this aspect of emancipatory struggle is not only the newest but the furthest from traditional (not classical) labor concerns. The labor movement used to have its own knowledge—various socialist theories and ideologies—many addressed to the areas raised by the RSE project. It also had its own means of knowledge production and conservation—schools, papers, journals, colleges, archives. The shortcomings of the old theories, the collapse of communist, social-democratic and populist projects, and the frontal assault by (neo)liberalism, seem to have delivered the *coup de grace* to any independent notion of labor knowledge, to its classical values and to any self-confident identity.³ Whilst the contemporary

movement might make gestures, or preserve rituals, referring to classical labor traditions, it can hardly be expected to be sensitive to new and unfamiliar issues, claims and challenges to *raison du capital*—positivist, instrumental, consumptionist, technocratic, and possessive-individualist.

Finally, a *new labor internationalism*. An awareness of the shortcomings of the old internationalism(s), and the possibility of a new one, is present in the case studies to a greater or lesser extent. There is considerable reference to new levels of international union action (regional), to new inter/national alliances (with other social collectivities in the anti-globalization movement), to the actuality or potential of such forces or fora in protecting or extending national/local union action. There is also an awareness of the contradictory nature of the new extra-national (regional) institutions, as well as of the possible contradictions between national or regional unionisms. What this awareness points to is the necessity for an understanding (critical, innovatory), and an ethic (solidarity), that might allow for the negotiation and settlement of such differences. But this necessity receives no recognition (compare Wills (2001) on European Works Councils). Moreover, in so far as the inter/nationalisms are beyond the immediate region, they seem to be understood rather as something from which Southern unions can *benefit* than as something that they have *invented, constructed or could project* together with others.

There remain the two studies that seem, to me, to address most directly the interrelation between labor, internationalism and emancipation. It is to these that we must now turn attention.

LABOR INTERNATIONALISM AND EMANCIPATION

Gabriele Dietrich and Nalini Nayak's chapter on the Indian fishworkers' movement opens up the matter of an emancipatory labor internationalism beyond the class, the national and the union form that gave it historical shape. This is not only because of its foci but also of its approach, insofar as this is synthesized from Marxism, feminism, environmentalism and other contemporary sources.

The case of the Indian fishworkers seems to reveal, one after the other, all the self-limitations of modern national-industrial trade unionism. The authors' approach similarly reveals the limitations of those for whom the national-industrial working class and union provide the parameters. Concepts of the "traditional sector," the "informal sector," and of "atypical employment" are here revealed to be highly ideological and increasingly conservative. In India, the proportion of the economically active population in the "informal sector" grew, in the period between 1978 and 1998, from 89 percent to 92 percent! The percentage in this sector, across the world in 1998, varied from 15 percent in high-income countries to 80 percent in the

low. Given that the bulk of the world population and of the working classes (plural) live in this third zone, it is clear that it is the "atypical" workers of the world who are the typical ones (Gallin, 2001: 532–3)! And becoming more so, even at the capitalist core. A new labor internationalism cannot simply add-and-mix the growing number of women workers or those indirectly waged. It has to be rethought in a manner that no longer considers the traditional worker and union as the norm.

The fishworker case also reveals, in open and dramatic form, most of the problems that have been ignored, or concealed, or marginalized by the modern labor movement: the multiple identities of workers, women workers/working women, complex and conflicting notions of community, the search for work and production in harmony with nature, the increasing centrality of the international sphere, the necessity of simultaneously building up an *international* community of workers + communities and, on this base, and in function of their empowerment, negotiating with inter-state institutions. Particularly interesting for me is the manner in which, and the form within which, their internationalism is being created. Excluded by traditional unionism from membership in the institutionalized union internationals, the fishworkers have found their internationalism with the support of an international/ist NGO, and in the form of a network. These are, of course, the intermediary and mode customary to new non-union internationalisms (which does not mean they do not themselves require critical evaluation).

In terms of approach, too, the study suggests the value of combining traditional Marxism (analysis of capitalism, national and international, the notion of class identity and struggle), Feminism (recognition of gender as a fundamental social structure; the necessity of gender-sensitive analysis and strategy and the valorization of autonomous women's organization and struggle), and Environmentalism (analysis of the destructive dynamic of industrial capitalism, the struggle for environmentally friendly products, production methods and labor relations).

Let us here avoid two possible misunderstandings that could follow from the above commentary, if not from a careful reading of the original text. One is that we have discovered *the* way to emancipation, national and international, the other that we have discovered *the* vanguard thereof. These two errors, customarily combined, have been common to the left historically. And they reveal the continuing legacy of 1) ancient ideologies of human emancipation (that the last shall be the first, that there is a chosen people), 2) of the modern Marxist one (the most oppressed modern class as the bearer of international emancipation, the socialist intelligentsia as its guide and teacher). It is not *because* the fishworkers are the most oppressed (or the most marginalized, or that they represent the majority, or that they accumulate within their community the major forms of alienation under capitalism) that they suggest the future of labor emancipation and internationalism. It is rather

that systematic reflection upon these matters, made possible by collaboration with critically minded and socially committed intellectuals, *can* lead to the surpassing of previously concealed truths or ingrained misunderstandings. There is, finally, no guarantee that such emancipatory visions, desires or capacities, would survive any of the following assaults: 1) increased repression on the part of the state, inter-state policies and practices; commercial aggression on the part of inter/national capital; 2) a sophisticated and extensive reform policy by the same powers; 3) a similarly sophisticated proposal of marriage by an otherwise un-emancipated trade union movement, national or international (i.e., one still insisting on the male superior position); 4) a substitutionist, instead of an empowering, role by the intellectuals/professionals supporting (or leading!) the movement, whether at the local, national or international level.

Rob Lambert and Edward Webster: "Social Emancipation and the New Labor Internationalism: A Southern Perspective." This study of the Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR) directly addresses the issue of a new labor internationalism, theoretically, historically, analytically and strategically. Although these levels/types of intellectual practice are not clearly distinguished (thus leading to a conflation of moments of intellectual practice), they nonetheless make a challenging and provocative contribution to the growing dialogue on the meaning of a global social movement unionism.⁴ What Lambert and Webster are writing about is a particular attempt to create a new labor internationalism in and from the South. The project is independent of the traditional international trade union organizations and of the traditional inter-state instances (regional or international). In so far as SIGTUR is a horizontal network of Southern trade unions, it combines the traditional union form with certain principles and practices of the so-called new social movements.⁵ Lambert and Webster also make considerable reference to classical Marxist thinking and the socialist tradition. They see socialism as *the* alternative to capitalism. They also refer to and use some of the contemporary critical literature on globalization and internationalism, particularly to argue for a "grounded" approach to globalization, and to a globalization from below that will lead to the development of a "global unionism."

What Lambert and Webster are simultaneously arguing for, trying to promote, and claiming evidence of, is a model of a new labor internationalism built from what I would consider "the most difficult place"—the twentieth-century industrial working class, national-industrial unionism, and socialist theory. How they do this is by *extending* from classical socialist theory and strategy towards those theories and strategies offered by contemporary critical understandings of global society and social movements. SIGTUR comes out of their account as an original experiment, requiring considerable leadership qualities in balancing off the various national union traditions, and

then these with the various new movement and conceptual/strategic elements at play. Thus, what is evidently required by them as *researchers* of SIGTUR is an awareness of such tensions, as well as of the relevant global context; and what is needed from them as SIGTUR *activists* is relevant action based on such an understanding. Given that the two roles are personified by the authors, this raises further problems (are they analyzing or propagating?) and possibilities (e.g., of making collective self-reflection part of the political project).

I would consider as a particular problem *the centrality to SIGTUR of the traditional working class and the traditional union organization*. In the case of India, for example, the two major SIGTUR affiliates, the All-Indian Trade Union Congress, allied with the Communist Party of India, and the Congress of Indian Trade Unions, allied with the Communist Party (Marxist) of India, represent perhaps 2 to 4 percent of India's workers. Their members are concentrated in the large-scale and public industrial and service sectors, currently being undermined by neoliberal globalization. In the case of India, furthermore, the SIGTUR relationship with such union centers would appear to be an obstacle to a relation with the labor organizations representing the growing majority of "atypical workers" (such as the fishworkers mentioned above).

Within SIGTUR, it appears, globalization is experienced rather as a threat to be resisted than as a terrain to be disputed. This is understandable *particularly for those industries, workers and unions that provide the base of SIGTUR*. Millions of contemporary working people, however, have never been part of the unionized or unionizable working class. And millions of others are, or are becoming, "information workers," already familiarizing themselves with computers and cyberspace. There may already be 20,000 workers in the globalized "call center" industry in India, with ten times that figure predicted over a seven-year period (BBC World Service and Indian press). So whilst this new extended working class might join unions, or call their associations unions, they may have other experiences of, orientations toward and expectations concerning the international than their predecessors (Hale and Shaw, 2001; Wichterich, 2000; Wright, 2001).

It is, moreover, increasingly meaningful to characterize the new internationalisms (there are many, even among workers) as "communications internationalisms," in the sense that they operate within the sphere of the electronic media, are culturally active there, and see cyberspace as an increasingly central and disputable terrain. It is here notable that whilst Lambert and Webster claim that SIGTUR is electronically active, this activity referred, at the time of writing, only to email—the earliest and most limited mode of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Unlike an increasing number of internationalist labor, or labor + social-movement projects, SIGTUR not only has no website but also has an extremely limited web presence. This despite the relatively high web activity of national unions

within three major SIGTUR affiliates, Australia, South Korea, and South Africa.⁶

Finally, it should be noted that rapid innovations, and even internationalist initiatives in the international labor movement, are coming from the *old inter/national* trade union organizations! This is precisely because of the relative (but only relative) freedom of the internationals from the remains of the old national trade unions and industrial relations, legal and welfare systems. It may also be due to a certain awareness that the old institutional ground on which the internationals stood (particularly the ILO) is being marginalized or dissolved by international financial institutions, in which labor does not even have a token position.

None of the above devalues what SIGTUR is or does. What it does mean is that it has to be situated and evaluated within a more general terrain of international and internationalist labor activity—particularly that of the growing number of international/ist labor (and labor-related) communication, rights, education and cultural projects, and, further, in relation to the traditional international trade union institutions. And that its own understandings of solidarity, socialism and of a global social movement unionism need to be discussed amongst its members, and exchanged with other such networks. Otherwise it might find itself squeezed out of existence between the more powerful union internationals on the one side and the less-work-erist GJM on the other.⁷

I will not attempt to summarize my comments on these two chapters. I hope that their authors (as well as those of the other two chapters commented on above) will feel addressed by the more direct statements on labor, internationalism and emancipation below.

ON EMANCIPATING LABOR INTERNATIONALISM, BUT FROM WHAT?

I have suggested that the most difficult position from which to develop a new internationalism is that circumscribed by 1) the traditional industrial working class, 2) the national-industrial trade union, and 3) traditional socialist theory. I will continue by here detailing what internationalism has to be emancipated from, and then, in the following section, what it has to be emancipated for.

The traditional industrial working class. Although, particularly in its period of formation, this class certainly displayed internationalist attitudes and proclivities, this had as much to do with the *early period* as with its *proletarian status*. The remarkable concessions that labor later wrung out of national capital and the nation-state guaranteed for most of the twentieth century that it would consider these as the parameters of its thought and action. So, despite Marx's

assumptions or hopes, there is no reason to assume that this class is or will be the permanent and privileged bearer of internationalism and emancipation:

[W]hy should the forms of community produced by capitalist industry be any more solid than any other capitalist product? Might not these collectivities turn out to be [...] only temporary, provisional, built for obsolescence? [...] [I]f this is so, then [worker] solidarity, however impressive at any given moment, may turn out to be [...] transient [...]. The workers may sustain each other today on the assembly line or the picket line, only to find themselves scattered tomorrow among different collectivities with different conditions, different processes and products, different needs and interests. (Berman, 1983: 104)

Written twenty years ago, long before the appearance and recognition of a globalized, networked capitalism (GNC), and without reference to the international, this reads like a prediction of what a GNC is now producing.⁸ But this quotation does not capture the fact that what is also produced by capitalism has been workers marked by multiple non- or cross-class interests, identities and cultures, particularly that of a state-defined nationalism. It would seem infinitely more realistic to recognize that the industrial working class is neither the *essence* of the working class, nor is its internationalism that of *all* the working classes. One must recognize as well that working-class internationalisms (for there have been many historically, and there are many across the world today) are not necessarily more advanced than those of other classes or categories. This can be confirmed by historical research, by empirical research—or by simple observation of, for example, the contemporary anti-globalization (now anti-war) internationalisms. Even, finally, when and where workers may be more internationalist, or lead such contemporary movements, there is nothing in the traditional industrial wage-labor relationship that ensures that such leadership will be reproduced elsewhere in space or time.

The national-industrial trade union. This is my generic term for a type of unionism that has spanned the twentieth century, and which *underlies* the many political-economic phases and political-ideological tendencies that the literature identifies to explain the limitations of working-class internationalism. The construction of this form was another historical achievement of the working class that also resulted in a plateau—or prison—for internationalist consciousness and action. The general problem of twentieth-century unionism is that

Throughout the 20th century, unions, as the historical form of worker representation, have developed a variety of social functions. Such functions have

varied from representing the aspirations and claims of a relatively homogeneous social group—creating its identity, framing its solidarity and integrating its members into a society which excluded them—to contributing to the system's social regulation by transforming individual interests into collective ones and the latter into suitable proposals for collective bargaining. (Catalano, 1999: 27–8)

Anna María Catalano argues further that, due to the rapidly changing nature of production, this form of union representation is now in crisis.

What we need to add is one general feature of the trade union that becomes even more ambiguous at the international level. This is, as just stated, the union *form*, with “form” understood in the literal sense: a hierarchical, formally representative-democratic, organization, both addressed to and limited by the capitalist (or would-be capitalist, or collective capitalist) state. This form and parameter ensured that union internationalism created a *higher level* to the pyramid, within which unions represented *nationally defined* working classes. The “iron law of oligarchy” (Michels, 1915), discovered within national working-class organizations, meant that the bottom-up flow of representation and power was largely reversed, with the leaders now controlling the members. At the international level, this meant not only a more distant level but also *one at which the working class was represented as much in state-national as in class or category terms*. This became the norm, with national union leaders acting within inter-state bodies like diplomats, using such power and wealth as they might possess, to impose their particular ideas and interests within the internationals.⁹ Also, this was customarily behind the backs, or out of sight, of a largely demotivated or demobilized working class. The internationals also helped construct and then fitted themselves into a liberal-democratic inter-state organization, the ILO, within which they accepted a clearly subordinate status (25 percent of the votes) and a lobbying role.¹⁰ At the inter-state level, moreover, the flow of union information and solidarity was largely determined by the shape of this “pyramid without a base,” in which local or national worker initiatives had to flow up past two or three gatekeepers, then down before they reached the fellows with whom they wished to exchange information or express solidarity. Finally, as is well known, there was not just one such inter-state pyramid; there were three competing against each other for the right to represent workers—who generally did not (and do not) know they exist.

Socialist theory. Traditional socialist theory, left, right or center, has also been *workerist, nationalist and institutionalist*. This means that—in so far as it has been critical of union internationalism, or international unionism—this has tended to be in terms of ideology (“revolutionary” vs. “reformist,” “class” vs. “populist”), of strategy (“confrontation” vs. “partnership”), of “bureaucracy”

(which is only the human face of the structural problem), or of “trade union imperialism” (a notion that ignores or justifies the state-nationalism of *peripheral* capitalist unionism). Even when and where involved in the creation of independent union networks, socialists tend to consider as the norm the internationalism of, for example, auto-industry workers (Moody, 1997). They also tend to give priority to the capitalist nation-state as the privileged terrain or level of struggle (and to be therefore skeptical or suspicious of both computerized communication and of networking as a relational form).¹¹

None of the above should be taken as implying the abandonment or dismissal of, say, the 157 million workers in unions formally affiliated to the ICFTU. What it means is that we (who favor an emancipatory internationalism) see them as a problem or a challenge. The unionized industrial working class is no more (and no less) naturally or tendentially internationalist than your average wo/man in the street! The traditional working class may still, indeed, occupy a strategically significant place within the political economy, but one cannot read off consciousness, or predict future behavior, from a position within the political economy, any more than one can read women off from the status of women within an increasingly globalized gender system (Wichterich, 2000)! Nor can one assume that the unions’ strategic place within the international political economy is some kind of guerrilla *foco*, within which a counter-hegemony can be constructed, since this is also a fortress of relative privilege and can (like the *foco*) function as an isolation cell.

ON EMANCIPATING LABOR INTERNATIONALISM: BUT HOW? AND FOR WHAT?

I will now consider emancipation not *from* (the easier part) but *for*. I propose to do so by trying to answer the following three questions. If certain concepts have been above expressed negatively, they will here be expressed positively.

How are we to understand *globalization* in relation to labor?

I have used the concept of a globalized networked capitalism (GNC) and want to explain the relevance of this in particular reference to labor (see Waterman, 2001a: 204–7). While I myself see globalization as multi-determined insofar as its aspects—economic, productive, organizational, military/policing, cultural and gender/sexual—are mutually determining (so that its victims, movements and imagined alternatives need to be, and can be, increasingly seen to interpenetrate, inform each other and be mutually supportive), I do consider that the importance of wage work and unionism has until recently been under-emphasized within the new social movements. (Exceptions here are the women’s movement, because of its concern with work in all its forms, and the human rights movement, because of its concern with labor rights.)

A globalized capitalism increasingly confronts labor globally. The rapidity of change in waged work; in its relative growth or decline; in its nature; in its separation by labor market; in the balance and distribution of such nationally, regionally and globally; in the nature of its products—all this requires us to radically rethink labor movement strategies, from the local to the global level. The key to the contemporary transformation of the global capitalist economy and waged work is the leading role played by knowledge and information. Whether in the form of information technology, or of computerized equipment (both in production and as product), it is connected with a reduction in the total demand for labor, a shift in control within the labor process from the machine operator to the technician, from economies of scale (mass production) to those of scope (batch production for “niche” markets), from production to services, with a decentralization of production (whilst retaining central managerial or financial control), and with networking relations between such central controllers. I would therefore see this process as simultaneously undermining an identity based primarily on (wage) labor and creating the basis for a new *cross-class* movement, questioning the continuing subordination within and enslavement by work, the nature of products, the ethic of competition, consumerism, growth, etc. This suggests the necessity for the existing labor organizations, national and international, to convert themselves into a global social movement around work, but intimately articulated with those on the new social issues (an argument developed below).

How are we to understand the emancipation of labor in relation to a globalized and networked capitalism?

Andre Gorz (1999a) continues earlier arguments for liberation from what he calls a “wage-based society,” but now in reference to a globalized and networked capitalism—one that is simultaneously abolishing conventional wage work and the working class, and introducing Third World conditions of labor into the First World:

A new system has been established which is abolishing “work” on a massive scale. It is restoring the worst forms of domination, subjugation and exploitation by forcing each to fight against all in order to obtain the “work” it is abolishing. It is not this abolition we should object to, but its claiming to perpetuate that same work, the norms, dignity and availability of which it is abolishing, as a norm, and as the irreplaceable foundation of the rights and dignity of all. [...] “Work” must lose its centrality in the minds, thoughts and imaginations of everyone. We must learn to see it differently: no longer as something we have—or do not have—but as *what we do*. (Gorz, 1999a: 1; emphasis in original)

Gorz (1999b/1989) earlier identified the kinds of work that exist in addition to 1) conventional wage labor, which includes, 2) domestic labor, 3) self-employment (primarily the additional task of women), and, 4) autonomous activity (artistic, relational, educational, mutual-aid, etc). He argued for a movement from the first (waged) to the fourth (autonomous) kind, and for the second and third kind to be increasingly articulated with the fourth, rather than subordinated to the first. In his more recent work he has emphasized the two interrelated tendencies of what we might call capitalist-defined work. One is computerization, under which "millions of clerical or technical workers," along with "a majority of service providers" (Gorz, 1999a: 2) do not produce anything tangible (in the sense that a pre-industrial craft worker, or even an industrial production worker might). The other is the sub-proletarianization that is so familiar in the third world:

This is how [...] a historically unprecedented mass of capital obtained historically unprecedented rates of profit; and how that capital managed to achieve growing volumes of wealth-production while consuming less and less labor, distributing less and less in wages, paying less and less in taxes [...] ceasing to finance the social and environmental costs engendered by production. (Gorz, 1999a: 5)

Gorz continues, and writes of a world civilizational crisis, marked by anomie, barbarism and warfare—a vision that has become more general following S11 (September 11, 2001). There is, he says, no point in trying to get back to the old world of capitalist wage labor (which is what the international trade union movement is largely trying to do). This would be a matter of seeking "subordinate reforms" (Gorz, 1999a: 7), whereas what we need is "revolutionary reforms," in the sense of those unlimited to the arena of capitalist wage work—old or new.

Going beyond the wage-labor society requires, in the argument of Gorz, three things: 1) rejection of the capitalist *discourse of work* (which is also that of the international union movement) and consideration of the implications of other forms of productive cooperation, exchange, solidarity and life; 2) recognition of the manner in which capitalism is not only destroying its conditions of existence but also producing conditions for its own transcendence; and 3) increasing the distance between capitalism and society—the spaces in which other forms of work and life can be produced (Gorz, 1999a: 78–9).

The three principles that Gorz considers those that have been as made both possible and necessary by contemporary capitalist development are 1) the guaranteeing of a sufficient income for all; 2) combining a redistribution of work with individual and collective control over time; 3) the encouraging of new forms of cooperation and exchange, through which new post-capitalist social relations could develop. The principle on which Gorz's

(life)work is based was the original aim of the labor movement. This was not so much "a fair day's pay for a fair day's work," as "the abolition of the wage system." As its eventual aim, the latter was even recognized by Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and an American nationalist, militarist and fierce opponent of even reformist socialism! Whilst this early notion of waged work as something to be *emancipated from* faded and disappeared as labor and unionism were socialized into national industrial colonial¹² capitalism, there now arise—at this end of capitalism—new demands for the reduction of wage-working time, the egalitarian redistribution of that which continues, and (more marginally) for forms of production, trade, services, care and consumption subversive of the centralizing, competitive, hierarchical and dictatorial *raison du capital*.

It is impossible to go into detail with Gorz's proposals. Suffice it here to say that his is no rural or local utopianism (for which see the interesting argument of Starr, 2000)—though it would certainly increase the autonomy and power of both—but a thoroughly urban and urbane one, conscious also of the possibilities or necessities of long-distance and international economic relations. Indeed, he seems to consider that globalization, computerization, and informatization make his proposals both more necessary and more possible:

The spread of computerization gives a constant boost to the potential of co-operative networks. Computers can be used to make their management transparent and easy to monitor by all the members [...]. The cooperative circle may thus lead gradually to the collective appropriation of the new technologies, including [...] flexible computerized manufacturing systems which would be acquired [...] on a hire-purchase basis, or which its members would "put together," in much the same way as computer and mechanical equipment is recovered in the shanty towns of Africa or South America and "cannibalized" to meet local needs. There is now no longer any great gulf between the performance of the brand-marked production tools of industry and the tools a local community can use for self-producing. (Gorz, 1999a: 107)

The direction in which Gorz is looking is consistent with more general left theoretical and political activity.

For the first we can consider the socialist-feminist-ecological argument of Diane Elson, which also deals with three ways of getting from "here" to "there":

The first is to strengthen the movements demanding greater accountability in the use of economic power [...]. The watchword is democratizing the economy [...]. The second is to strengthen movements that are seeking in various ways to transform markets, to embed them in egalitarian social

relations, through social entrepreneurship and through participatory setting and monitoring of social standards. The third is to build links between the realization of human rights, the right to enjoy common property, and the exercise of collective rights over corporate property. (Elson, 1999: 83)

For the second we can consider the draft list of workshops for the World Social Forum that took place in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in early 2002. One of the several major themes was to be on Production of Wealth and Social Reproduction. Within this there were to be eight sub-themes on such subjects as trade, MNCs, control of finance capital, debt, solidarity economics, alternative economic models, and desirable models of labor relations (each of these sub-themes being further subdivided). There were, when I made a rule-of-thumb count in November 2001, over 100 proposed topics within the theme as a whole (mostly at this time from Brazil). There were fourteen proposed topics in the sub-area of solidarity economics—an anti- or post-capitalist notion. The union proposals tended, of course, to concentrate in the labor relations area—one almost inevitably assuming the parameters of the capitalist wage-labor relationship. (So, while alternatives to capitalism were discussed at Porto Alegre, it is possible that the Forum saw a reproduction, rather than a surpassing, of the old union understanding of work, the economy, and of worker interests within the wage relationship.)

It might be worthwhile considering a *general* understanding of emancipation that goes beyond the wage-labor relationship (or, rather, is blissfully unaware of such). Jan Nederveen Pieterse understands emancipation under contemporary conditions as implying a

concern with autonomy [...], a tendency towards network forms, and [...] towards self-limitation. The [...] postmodern emancipations [...] problematize power to a much greater degree [...]. A working definition I propose is that emancipation refers to collective actions which seek to level and disperse power, or seek to install more inclusive values than the prevailing ones. This means that emancipation [...] involves a moral horizon. (Pieterse, 1992: 31–2)

Given the extent to which trade unions embody Enlightenment notions of emancipation and nineteenth-century notions of how to achieve such, this definition is challenging—if not subversive. *Autonomy* would imply not only that of unions from capital, state and political parties, but also of worker collectivities within unions, and the autonomy from union domination of struggles of working people outside the unions. *Networking* would imply a fundamental questioning of the traditional trade union form, that of a hierarchical organization—shamefacedly, if not proudly, based on the “iron law of oligarchy”—and a recognition and even incorporation of the principle of

networking as one more appropriate for confronting a GNC. *Self-limitation* might be no problem for a union movement that has long abandoned any notion of labor remaking society, but it does for those still-influential union or socialist radicals whose notions of emancipation imply a society and state defined and controlled by wage-workers. The *problematization of power*, too, would be a major challenge to unions whose notion has always been that of concentrating within themselves at least a “countervailing power” that would in some sense balance off or challenge that of capital and state. The idea that one needs rather to dissolve or disperse power (not only within or against capitalism but also within the unions) is not common to the labor movement—left, right, or center. Nor is the question of new, more inclusive values, or a *moral horizon*. Such a moral horizon has either faded or been lost to unions that see themselves, or anyway behave, as an interest or pressure group; or that are themselves heavily identified with or oriented toward capital, state, or interstate instances subordinate to such; or to a unionism that expresses itself in terms of a quantifiable increase or reduction of what is available within the parameters of capitalist economies increasingly out of control. Such a moral horizon is today rather offered by the global justice movement (GJM), in so far as it proposes and sometimes demonstrates universalizable (not universalistic) values, which certainly address also the interests of unionized workers.

How are we to understand a new labor internationalism in relation to both globalization and the emancipation of labor?

I want to here offer a general understanding of what I prefer to call a new global solidarity unionism (NGSU), followed by a specification of how I would see this expressed on the specific issue of labor rights. In both cases I would consider that the orientation is both emancipatory and practical. But if the first could be considered to be at the end of a long road, the second is intended to bring it right up to the front door.

An NSGU consists of a number of elements or requirements (Waterman, 2001b):

A fundamental critique of, and attractive alternative to, our new globalized networked capitalism. The critique of the negative effects of globalization is now familiar within the trade union movement internationally, and we could even witness the system being publicly named/shamed by US union leaders, at Seattle, 1999, as “corporate capitalism.” In so far as it is so recognized, we need to specify an alternative to such (rather than a return to a failed previous stage/strategy, or mere regulation/reform of the present one, leaving intact the underlying economic and political dynamic and its continuing ethic of possessive individualism). We need to remember Gandhi’s (apocryphal)

answer when asked what he thought of Western civilization: "I think it would be a wonderful ideal!" It is only by developing civilizational alternatives, based on current global human needs, capacities and desires, that we could challenge/threaten/force (inter)state bodies and transnational corporations into even considering serious *reforms*. Such "green, socialist, feminist, radical-democratic" alternatives are being increasingly spelled out, as has been suggested, within the GJM.

A new understanding of international solidarity. This means a multifaceted solidarity (of Identity, Substitution, Reciprocity, Complementarity, Affinity and Restitution), on multiple axes (North-South, South-South, etc), in multiple directions (therefore also South to North, East to West), of increasing scope and depth, owned and controlled by working people of all kinds, at the shopfloor, grassroots, and community levels (Waterman, 2001a: 235-9). By "global solidarity" is implied that it addresses global issues, of which relations between nation-states, and unions or workers so identified, are but one. The notion that solidarity is multifaceted is crucial, given the absence of classical left and labor theorization, and the virtual absence of the concept in the "alternative" literature. Each of the aspects of global solidarity as above identified carries part of the meaning, while each on its own has its limits. Thus, for example, an Identity Solidarity ("Workers of the World Unite!") obviously carries part of the meaning but excludes non-workers—however identified. A Restitution Solidarity (the righting of past wrongs, a solidarity with the past) can be expressed in financial terms without addressing the moral or emotional issues that need to be confronted. Such a complex understanding could not only aid analysis but also future strategy. This would mean developing a multifaceted solidarity strategy, expressing many of these aspects and certainly avoiding reduction to one.

Establishing a positive dynamic, dialectic and dialogue within unions, between unions, and beyond unions—locally, nationally, regionally, globally. We see such taking place increasingly, as inter/national union leaders and organizations begin to respond assertively or even aggressively, rather than defensively, to the union-threatening impact of a GNC. Pragmatic and momentary responses need, however, to be transformed into matters of principle and an ongoing practice. This new kind of relationship requires recognizing the limitations of "the union organization" and the advantages of "the labor network"—in terms of speed, flexibility and creativity. It also requires that those with power (international unions, union leaders) make room and create space for those without it (those at the institutional, social or socio-geographic margins).

The necessity of international labor movement activity at multiple levels and in multiple spaces, with a similar dialectic between them. In so far as it is recognized that

emancipatory thinking and action are not confined to a particular space or level (e.g., shopfloor internationalism vs. institutional internationalism), then we need to develop strategies that positively and dynamically integrate such. This means that international unions and officers, traditionally concentrating attention on international negotiations and lobbying, and, indeed, largely excluded from direct address to the workers represented by *their* members (national unions), have to rethink their role in terms of what stimulates, expresses, informs, inspires and moves the (hypothetical) local internationalisms of ordinary working people.

The necessity for the union movement to be culturally/communicationally active internationally. This follows from the above, in so far as, for example, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), with 157 million members, has virtually no international media presence and impact, when compared with bodies like Greenpeace and Amnesty, with a couple of millions. In an increasingly informatized world, in which the political sphere is moving from parties and parliaments to the media, and in which information, ideas and values are increasingly central, the international union movement has to move from an organizational to a communications internationalism if it is to be effective.

Toward a new global civil-society compact. Even today the international trade union movement understands a "social contract," "social compact" or "partnership" in terms of a specific compromise or long-term settlement with *capital* and *state*, and then on the model of such as developed *within* the nation-state during the NICC phase now passing. These are compacts in the sphere of the "economic" and the "political," rather than of the "social" (civil society). In relation to capital and state, labor is in the inferior/dependent position. A "social contract," "compact" or "partnership" today needs to be first with *society*. This means with(in) civil society, with other radical-democratic social movements and organizations. And it has to be *global*—for the creation of an increasingly civil global society. Future compromises made with (trans)national capital and (inter)state organizations should be *called* compromises. They should also be seen and presented as temporary or momentary truces, rather than permanent understandings, values or institutions, since the mobility and rapidity of capitalist transformation today hardly allows for more than this. Such compromises have, moreover, to be publicly justified and understood as relevant to later and further advances in social consciousness and struggle. And they will have to be made—if unions are to avoid the self-isolation of the recent past—in the light of global solidarity and civil society, and in accord with other radical-democratic bodies and voices.

From debate to dialogue in labor and social movement exchanges on international labor and labor internationalism. I understand debate, or polemic, as an attempt to destroy the argument of the other; discussion as listening to the argument of the other; and dialogue as learning from the argument of the other. These three could be seen as representing a scale in the civility of discourse. As far as labor movement self-expression is concerned, they could also be seen as rhetorical modes, voices or styles related to different stages of capitalist development (Waterman, 1995). I see, in any case, a relationship between an early, simple, railway-age capitalism (forward/backward) and a political and moral Manichaeism: worker/capitalist, capitalism/socialism, dictatorship/democracy, reform/revolution, parliamentary/extra-parliamentary, for/against, within/without, local/global, vice/virtue—or, of course, virtue/vice. I see a similar relationship between a complex information-age capitalism and a dialectical logic, requiring dialogue. This is not only because a simple capitalism has become a complex one. It is also because of the logic of feedback built into computers, thus allowing for (if not requiring) exchanges that allow for (if they do not require) self-education and learning.

Be all this as it may, it is both my perception and experience that there is taking place a movement from debate to dialogue on international labor questions. It is also my *hope* that this should be so. What I am primarily concerned with here is to persuade people of the particular suitability of dialogue to the advance of labor's interests, and the development of a flexible and creative self-identity, in and against a complex capitalist order.¹³ Here, I suggest, a binary logic and polemical expression are increasingly counterproductive.

So much for the general statement. Now for an emancipatory strategy as applied to the immediate and central issue of international labor rights. While it is clear that a *general* strategy is needed, it also seems to me that the matter of labor rights has particular salience (Waterman, 2001c):

- It begins with an existing and growing inter/national union recognition.
- It articulates this with the needs and demands of non-unionized and even “non-unionizable” labor.
- Human rights discourse is one that has been both expanded and deepened over the last 50 years, and been found profoundly empowering and effective by both indigenous and women's movements.
- Human rights discourse has widespread cross-cultural legitimacy—at least amongst those denied such.
- Human rights discourse is capable of infinite future expansion.

The proposal below grows out of a critique of the Social Clause strategy of traditional institutionalized union internationalism. This attempt, now fifteen years old and considered unlikely to be achieved during the next

twenty-five, is one of establishing core labor rights within what is now the WTO. This has been primarily a lobbying activity, carried out behind the backs or over the heads of the workers it is supposed to defend.¹⁴ Mark Anner, who accepts the parameters of the Social Clause strategy, nevertheless reveals these shortcomings. Anner seems to identify himself, however, with certain Southern union criticisms of the Social Clause campaign (from South Africa and Brazil in particular) and proposes a Southern-based strategy intended to either supplement or surpass such shortcomings. He appears to endorse the demand of these major Southern unions that the Social Clause strategy be articulated with development issues. This is on the grounds expressed by a South African union leader, to the effect that “we have not succeeded in making the social clause a demand of the South” (Anner, 2000: 21).

My proposal would be an alternative to both the present Northern strategy and a hypothetical Southern alternative. I see the Northern-based strategy as counterproductive insofar as it articulates labor rights with capitalist free-trade discourse, and makes labor rights dependent on the international capitalist institution at the vanguard of their destruction—the WTO. And whilst I understand the Southern-based reaction, I would consider it an error to articulate labor rights with development/dependency discourses that have themselves *accompanied* the continuing underdevelopment of the South over the last half-century! If, it seems to me, we are seriously concerned about the advance of international labor rights in the era of neoliberal globalization, then what we need is an emancipatory strategy—one surpassing the discourses and practices of either core or peripheral capitalism. It would be one that was neither Northern-based nor Southern-oriented but which would, rather, be a locally informed global social movement strategy intended to meet the needs of both—not to speak of the East.¹⁵ The alternative strategies are summarized in Table 15.1. Let me expand on the third one.

- In so far as the assault on labor rights is global, the response has to be both international and internationalist; insofar as repression is being globalized, Core Labor Rights have to be expanded to include at least a) the right to strike, and b) the right to international solidarity action.
- In so far as an increasing proportion of the global labor force is un-unionized and/or non-unionizable (houseworkers, homeworkers, petty-commodity sector), the campaign has to focus on *labor* rights generally rather than *union* rights narrowly, to address all laboring people, to involve those representing the non-unionizable.
- The fundamental “social partnership” with capital and state of the NIC period has to be replaced by a fundamental partnership, at all socio-political levels and scales, with the human rights and global justice movements, and with democratic civil society.

Table 15.1. THREE STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING INTERNATIONAL LABOR RIGHTS**1. The Northern-based strategy of the ICFTU and major affiliates**

1. →	2. →	3. →	4. →
Development of social clause strategy over last 15–25 years by ICFTU/ITSs and Northern affiliates	Sub-regional activities in the South, to galvanize support for the social clause campaign	National-level lobbying for government support linking trade to labor rights	Union/state lobbying transforms World Trade Organization (within the next 25 years)

2. A Southern-based supplementary/alternative strategy

1. →	2. →	3. →	4. →
South takes the lead in establishing social clause strategy, supported by North	Alliances with churches and NGOs for broad and systematic Southern campaign in streets and lobbies	Shift in public opinion affects government positions, North and South	Union/state lobbying transforms World Trade Organization (within the next 25 years)

3. An emancipatory global solidarity strategy

1. →	2. →	3. →	4. →
Global dialogue on international labor rights, at all union levels and with all working people, on all socio-geographic axes, with all other democratic civil society forces	Global alliance and campaign linking social movements at all levels, on all axes, using streets, dominant and alternative media (real and virtual), North, South and East	Targeted at an International Labor Organization with greater union and labor movement (pro-labor NGO) participation, and greater powers	Linked to demand that any future “world trade organization” be subordinated to human rights and needs, under the United Nations, open to civil society, and with powers of enforcement

[Adapted and extended from Anner (2000)]

—Rather than suggesting that lobbying is sufficient for Northern unions but that social movements are unavoidable for Southern ones, it needs to be recognized that in all cases lobbying and negotiation must be subordinated to movement needs and be articulated with other relevant strategies.

—Rather than accepting the inevitability of international financial institutional (IFI) hegemony, it is necessary to a) shift decision-making on labor *back* into the ILO; b) demand the ILO receive the powers equivalent to those granted to the IFIs; c) campaign for a *new* ILO composition (adding pro-labor NGOs) and an increased proportion of labor votes (up from the 25 percent of 1919 to ... 33 percent? ... 50 percent? ... by 2019?).

It seems to me that such a radical-democratic proposal is compatible with the strategies being argued for or developed by a number of inter/national labor-oriented networks, whether based in the North or the South. Indeed, it is in part inspired by such (John, 2001; International Center for Trade Union Rights, 2000; Women Working Worldwide, 1996). And, whilst, of course, it is inspired by an emancipatory rather than an ameliorative vision, and therefore contrasts dramatically with the Social Clause strategy, it seems not wildly utopian (in either the positive or pejorative senses). While drawing from the “revolutionary reform” orientation mentioned earlier, it is, I think, a proposal that could speak to traditional labor internationalists, of both the right and the left.

Even if the proposal can be challenged as being too radical (or too reformist by radical laborists of the “either/or” school), it would seem to have a high *threat* value with respect to those globalizers whose institutional/ideological hegemony over labor is still largely unchallenged, and high *provocation/stimulation* value with respect to the broad international labor movement, left, right, and center.

Neither of the two above statements makes a direct address to the issue of “work,” which I have earlier suggested must be the core of any new emancipatory labor strategy. All I can suggest here is that the general argument immediately above would allow for a discussion on “work” to take place. But it contains no guarantee of such. As for the hegemonic international labor rights strategy, it seems to be entirely addressed to “capitalist-defined work.” I do not have the time, or space, or ability, to develop this further here. But perhaps we need to explore the notion of “taking labor out of competition,” on the same grounds as doing so with health, education and public utilities. I offer the notion to better-qualified colleagues for reflection and development.¹⁶

THE NEW INTERNATIONALISM, A FUTURE UTOPIA, AND THE OLD MOLE

Boaventura de Sousa Santos suggests that we are today more or less condemned to being utopian:

What is to be done, then? The only route, it seems to me, is utopia. By utopia I mean the exploration by imagination of new modes of human possibility and styles of will, and the confrontation by imagination of the necessity of whatever exists—just because it exists—on behalf of something radically better that is worth fighting for, and to which humanity is fully entitled. (Santos, 1995: 479)

Yes: things are this bad ... and this good! Talking about utopia is another way of talking about emancipation but is more explicitly future-oriented and addressed more directly to desire and the imagination.¹⁷ I would like, therefore, to complete this essay with consideration of an attempt to relate (to re-relate) labor, internationalism, utopia and Marx's Old Mole (socialism), nibbling away at the foundations of capitalism.

I am referring to the millennial issue of the Canada/UK-based international annual, the *Socialist Register*, devoted to the subject of utopia (Panitch and Leys, 1999). The editorial piece by Panitch and Gindin, subtitled "Rekindling the Socialist Imagination," ends with one of those lists of "what is to be done" that are so useful for focusing an argument. As modest Marxists, they only offer us ten theses:

1. Overcoming alienation.
2. Attenuating the division of labor.
3. Transforming consumption.
4. Alternative ways of living [the feminist one—PW].
5. Socializing markets.
6. Planning ecologically.
7. Internationalizing equality.
8. Communicating democratically.
9. Realizing democracy.
10. *Omnia sint communia* ["all in common," the ancient egalitarian one—PW].

This list, with its underlying arguments, certainly rekindles the imagination and challenges the intellect. It nicely combines old labor and socialist aims with those of the new radical-democratic movements. It overlaps with the RSE Project at many points. It could, I think, also appeal to labor activists and offer the more universal and utopian perspective that they often lack or

lose. How do Panitch and Gindin address such fellow travelers on the road to utopia as I have mentioned above: Labor, Internationalism, Computers and Culture?

Labor. Panitch and Gindin have, I think, an ambiguous attitude toward labor and unionism in relation to utopia. On the one hand, they appear to endorse the classical notion that labor is "strategically positioned to lead the struggle for universal liberation" (13). On the other hand, they propose a "new unionism" (17–20), informed by understandings developed in the kind of movements mentioned above. It would seem to me that insofar as they recognize both the limitations of actually existing unionism and the extension of labor beyond their reach, it makes no sense to prioritize unionism in surpassing capitalism. Elsewhere, curiously, they actually *limit* unionism to engagement with the "local and national state" (20). This is at the very time when it is precisely the impact and engagement with the global (e.g., Seattle) that is renewing union thinking worldwide!

Internationalism. The above limitation is due to the authors' vision of internationalism as a relationship between nations and, therefore, between nationally defined classes and struggles. The language here belongs to the period of (opposition to) a NICC rather than the contemporary GNC. But, then, Panitch and Gindin seem to understand globalization more as the highest stage of imperialism than as a new capitalist site and scale, providing a radically different space (i.e., the cyber one) upon or within which labor and other struggles must be fought out and for which utopias must be thought out. Even less do they recognize informatization, as does Manuel Castells (1996: 327–8), as representing a social transformation as profound as the invention of the alphabet in Greece 2,700 years ago! In a text attributed to Norbert Lechner, the expression is "less an epoch of change than a change of epochs" (PNUD, 2000). It may be difficult (especially for socialists?) to conceive of a development within capitalism being simultaneously a change of epoch, but I am convinced that we need to do so.

Cyberspace. If Panitch and Gindin misinterpret globalization, they fail to even mention informatization. Yet this (ICT, the Internet, computerized production of computerized consumption and services, the Web, multimedia) is transforming not only the world of work and workers but the nature of the world. The Web must be understood as simultaneously a *tool* (an instrument for undefined purposes), a *place/space* (Castells's "real virtuality") and ... as a *utopia* (a place that does not exist; a good place; one still to be created). Increasing numbers of unions and socialists are recognizing its potential for a new kind of global solidarity and for creating some kind of globalized networked unionism. This requires us, again, in distinction from Panitch and

Gindin, to confront the two major constraints on labor self-emancipation: 1) its being structured into hierarchical organizations, and 2) their state-national definition and address.

Culture. Panitch and Gindin's inclusion of "communicating democratically" on their list is a welcome addition. And they understand this as the creation of space for the development of a new culture. They even recognize both the absence of such an understanding in Marx and the *priority* of a socialist (utopian?) culture to inform moments of popular rebellion. I may be doing them an injustice in suggesting that they, nonetheless, have an instrumental understanding of culture—as something that informs something else. My feeling is that we live (exist, experience) in an increasingly mediated and culturally determined world. As an apocryphal saying from a woman slum dweller in Rio has it, "I would rather have a TV than a fridge because there is always something *em* ["on/in"] the TV." Seattle was not only organized largely through the net. It was a media event. It was broadcast, perceived—and was inevitably interpreted—through the dominant and alternative media. It was because of the failure of the US unions to understand the increasing centrality of culture and the media that half of the participants in Seattle (workers brought by unions) were almost invisible in dominant media coverage. The media may have referred to the "Teamsters-Turtles Alliance" and the meetings or statements of the AFL-CIO, but it was the turtles and the streets that got the coverage.

There is not too much else in the Panitch and Leys (2000) collection on *labor* as movement and, I think, nothing on unions as bearers of social emancipation and a post-capitalist future. This is in striking contrast to the number of items on women or by feminists, which certainly deal with labor but not with unions. The silence reveals more eloquently than words the continuing problem unions pose for socialists, particularly for those of a utopian bent.

CONCLUSION

Now, there was once a Soviet joke (meaning, of course, an anti-Soviet joke) in which the question went: "Is it possible to build socialism in one country?" And the reply went: "Yes, but it's better to live in another one." Today there is no "other" country. It is for this reason that we in the labor movement, under a GNC, are condemned to a global solidarity ethic, culture, and political activity. We may start with the imagination of a better or another workplace, a better or another locale, a better or another nation-state, but a workplace/local/national utopia uninformed by a global one is obviously going to have limited reach, appeal and effect. And it is going to have little relationship with either classical socialism, traditions of labor internationalism, or any kind of social emancipation I could forecast, imagine or dream of.

Notes

- 1 This chapter has been reduced from a longer paper, dealing in more detail with the papers contributed to the NLI theme of the RSE Project (Waterman, 2001c). The customary acknowledgements for comments on this and earlier drafts are made to the following, who, as usual, may be unable to recognize my response to such. I look forward, however, to reading their critiques of this outcome elsewhere at a later time: Stuart Hodgkinson (Leeds, UK), Massimo de Angelis (East London, UK), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Coimbra, Portugal) and, as always, Gina Vargas (Lima, Peru).
- 2 See www.ces.fe.uc.pt/emancipa.
- 3 Thus, when the USA's AFL-CIO invented (or commissioned at great expense?) the logo of "Working Families," this represented less a reaching out to wives, partners and children than a re-branding of an old product in terms consistent with the neoliberal discourse of "family values."
- 4 In their contribution, Lambert and Webster make explicit reference to, as well as take specific issue with, earlier writings of mine. This is one of a couple of ongoing exchanges between Rob, Eddie and myself, going back 10–15 years. In so far as our dialogue is directly relevant to the RSE project, there is no reason why it should not continue here. Indeed, it would be quite difficult to avoid it.
- 5 It therefore bears some comparison with the international network of West European dockers that was effective in the 1970s–80s. Based on the *Coordinadora* of Spanish dockers, particularly its Barcelona branch, this drew from the tradition of Spanish anarcho-syndicalism and of dock-worker communalism and internationalism. This innovative but (self-)isolated project foundered in the inhospitable industrial and social climate of the time, as well as, possibly, on the failure of its leaders to look outward and forward rather than inward and backward for inspiration (Waterman, 2001a: ch. 4).
- 6 The situation changed, at least temporarily, with the SIGTUR conference in Seoul, South Korea, in November 2001. The Korean Congress of Trade Unions then set up a site for SIGTUR (<http://nodong.org/sigtur/English/html/time.php>).
- 7 On 19 November 2001, the global day of union action against the WTO, the existence of SIGTUR was recognized publicly for what I believe to be the first time, on the ICFTU and Global Unions websites, <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991214082&Language=EN>. Recognition, if continued, may face SIGTUR with greater dilemmas than invisibility or rejection. This, in any case, was the case for various projects and individuals involved in autonomous international labor support projects of the 1980s.

- 8 The book of Wichterich (2000), already referred to, is something of an eye-opener here. Although this is not clear from her title, this is actually a book about "the globalized woman" in relation to globalized production, services and consumption. Although she mentions unions in passing, they do not play a central role in her narrative, even in the chapter on global women's movements. It would, indeed, be difficult to imagine all these forms of work being unionized, all the consequent protest of the workingwomen taking the union form.
- 9 A long-term involvement with and heavy commitment to any set of hegemonic institutions and procedures almost inevitably leads to several, if not all, of the characteristics that Kohn (1992) considers an *obstacle* to social change: Limited Vision, Adaptation, Self-Interest, Realism and Rationalization. Interestingly, Kohn is a specialist on education and is concerned with the damage that competition does to learning. We might wish to consider whether it is not adaptation also to the world of the market, to liberal-democratic party and electoral politics, and to the calculation of the possible under such conditions that disqualifies unions from acting as agents of emancipation under liberal-democratic capitalism.
- 10 The ambiguity of international unionism is revealed starkly even as it tries to respond to globalization. I am here thinking of the way in which the international organizations are hoisting the national-level partnership to the regional or international level. The ICFTU and ITSs are heavily committed to the UN's "Global Compact," currently being energetically promoted by UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan. This has been forcefully criticized, by one liberal-democratic specialist, as dramatically furthering the subordination of the UN to the corporations (Judge, 2000). "Social partnership," on the national or European level, has been promoted by retiring ICFTU General Secretary Bill Jordan, ever since he was a British national union leader (Jordan, 1994: xiii–xvii). The ICFTU/ITSs are now deeply committed to this global social partnership project and are attempting to further it by international-level agreements negotiated with major MNCs.
- 11 For a not untypical example, take the book by the respected Trotskyist academic Michael Löwy (1998) on nationalism and internationalism, historically and contemporaneously. Five of the six chapters are addressed to nationalism. The one that is not is addressed to internationalism, but only in relation to the main subjects of the chapter—nationalism and imperialism. Possibly 90 percent of the 125 references are to works on nationalism. None are to those on internationalism. In the last two paragraphs of his book, Löwy makes a gesture towards the internationalism of the new social movements and ideologies. But this is without telling us of what this consists, and why they have become the leading force for contemporary internationalism, with labor trailing

- notably behind. But, then, he nowhere in the book defines internationalism, far less theorizes it.
- 12 It occurs to me that unionism "as-we-know-it" has been *colonial* as well as national and industrial. I wish to hereby suggest: 1) that it took shape in the capitalist core alongside and as a condition for what has been called "social imperialism"—the creation, through the granting of rights, of social reforms and chauvinist propaganda of a working class literally fit for, and oriented toward, if not identified with, the imperial state; 2) that the model was exported to the capitalist periphery, where the collective-bargaining/welfare seeking, partnership-oriented, state-identified union exists or has existed, as reality or ideal, for much of the working class. Such trade unionism has customarily been complicit with the internal colonialism of local capital and state—not to speak of sub-imperial projects or resource wars with neighboring states (and working classes).
- 13 The beginning of one such (difficult) dialogue can perhaps be perceived in the response to S11 on the international English-language left/labor websites and lists. I will confine myself to Eric Lee's LaborStart, <http://www.laborstart.org/>, since he created a space for this on October 11, 2001. It was still attracting contributions over one month later. Insofar as Eric Lee identified himself with the "War On Terrorism" (as he even named the discussion site), its creation alone reveals that at least one "Northern-oriented labor internationalist" was not simply recognizing but even stimulating exchanges on what was a highly controversial matter. And this despite the fact that 1) his position was closer to that of the dominant inter/national unions, whilst 2) the majority of contributions were anti-war ones. While the style of the exchange varied along the debate-dialogue spectrum, it seemed to me to move from the one end toward the other over time. The case requires further investigation and reflection.
- 14 My proposal comes, more specifically, out of a reflection on the evaluation of an ICFTU campaign on the Social Clause, commissioned by the Norwegian trade union confederation (LO-Norway), and authored by Mark Anner (2000). The LO-N had arranged for the ICFTU to get some \$350,000 of Norwegian state development funding in order to campaign for the Social Clause in the period leading up to the Seattle WTO meeting in late 1999. The whole process is replete with contradictions. Since the Social Clause was meant to be *in the interests* of the non-West, rather than the West, why was it campaigned for only amongst unions in the *supposedly interested* world area? In so far as Norwegian unionists themselves—as the LO itself admits—did not "fully understand" the Social Clause they were supposedly supporting on behalf of non-Western unions, why was the campaign not also carried out in Norway? One is obliged to conclude that this was a strategy that 1) if

not protectionist, was at best substitutionist (one-way solidarity from above and outside); 2) was developed by inter/national union officers, independently of, and above the heads of, rank-and-file workers and unionists in the North.

- 15 "Locally informed" is becoming more complex day by day. Thus one can find powerfully argued positions coming from either India (Banaji, 2001) or the US (Pope, Kellman, and Bruno, 2001), which, while innovative, seem inspired by or directed at specific national circumstances or strategies. In neither case are international implications worked out—which will be an increasing requirement in the future. However, such assertive and forward-looking national proposals would certainly need to be taken into account in working out the internationalist strategy I outline here.
- 16 Myron Frankman (1998) argues for a global "citizen's income" but does not specify what form this would take, whether it would vary internationally, or how it would be implemented.
- 17 For an original overview of contemporary utopias with specific reference to Latin America, see Salamea (2000).

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