

# *Globalization and the Labour Movement: Challenges and Responses*

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## **ABSTRACT**

Up to a decade ago many labour movement strategists and analysts would probably have thought (though not necessarily said) that they were witnessing the beginning of the end of organized labour as a major political force. *'There is no alternative'* was not just a triumphalist slogan of the political right but a palpable feeling across the political spectrum. But by the turn of the century the mood began to shift as the labour movement regained some ground after the long night of neo-liberal onslaughts. Maybe we were now at the 'end of the beginning' of a new era where the workers and their organisations will begin to impact on the new global order they have helped to create through their labour? That is, anyway, the premise of this presentation. It is not, however, a simple proclamatory vision, but rather seeks to present a realistic appraisal of the challenges of globalisation and possible responses by the labour movement. The challenges are many: from informalization to international migration, from routinization of labour practices to a sustained attempt by capital to make the world's workers pay for the collapse of the neoliberal globalization model in 2008. It is arguably time for a sober appraisal of where global labour is in terms of a fight-back or perhaps, even in terms of offering an alternative vision for humanity.

**KEYWORDS:** globalization, informalization, Karl Polanyi, labour, migration, revitalization, global South

## *Introduction*

'Thoughtful trade unionists have come to recognise that playing safe is the most risky strategy. The present is either the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end'. (Hyman 2004: 23)

If we go back one hundred years we would see the formation of the trade union movement taking place as part and parcel of the formation of a *national* working class (see Van Der Linden 2003). Industrialisation, urbanisation and unionisation all went hand-in-hand. And it all happened within the clear parameters of an existing nation-state or one in formation. In the original industrialised countries the formation of a labour movement was inseparable from the national and social integration of the working people. In the colonial world the creation of a working class was inseparable from the development of a nationalist anti-colonial movement.

When the cycle of great revolutions began in Russia in 1917 through to China in 1945 thereafter the workers' movement was inevitably tied to the fortunes of the 'socialist fatherland' struggling against a hostile imperialist environment. So, from the 1870s through to the 1970s to put it simply, workers organised within nation states in combinations (trade unions) set within those parameters and they addressed their grievances towards that nation state seen as the arbiter of a predominantly national class struggle over the distribution of wealth.

What began to occur in the last quarter of the twentieth century was the break up of the dominant nation state-based economic model as what we now call globalisation kicked into gear. Economic internationalisation had flourished previously (1870-1914) but this time round its momentum seemed unstoppable. The potential threat of an alternative social and political order had evaporated with the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The 1990s were the period of easy globalisation: the corporations, the international economic organisations and the dominant nation-states paved the way for a new 'market-friendly' order. The trade unions oriented toward the nation-state found that the centre of gravity had shifted elsewhere. Back in the 1970s there had been sporadic moves towards trade union internationalism in a number of sectors but now a global outlook had become an imperative. A gradual realisation came across the labour movement that the old corporatist arrangements and partnerships with employers were no longer to be a viable mechanism to defend, let alone advance, the interests of working people.

It is generally recognized that historically labour movements take up to a decade to respond to the changing patterns of capital accumulation and employer strategies (see Arrighi 1996). What we have begun to see from 2000 onwards is a clear recognition from the international trade union movement that globalisation is a new paradigm which demands new strategies, tactics and organisational modalities. So in 1997 the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions had declared that globalisation posed 'the greatest challenge for unions in the twenty-first century' (ICFTU 1997). If the creation of a global economy was producing a global workforce then global unions might seem a logical development. But global economic power does not necessarily call forth a symmetrical global social counter-movement. The Netherlands Trade Union Confederation captured well the new mood when it declared that 'the trade union movement must reinvent itself in order to deal with the challenges of the twenty-first century' (Kloosterboer 2007: 1). This will involve local, national and international action, basic organising and engaging in the battle of ideas. Our collective task is to assess the achievements and limitation of this complex and difficult but essential task, especially now after the virtual collapse of the neo-liberal free-market financial model following the financial crisis of 2008. While the challenges we outline are very serious ones we will also posit the case that we are now at the 'end of the beginning' of a new era when a labour movement fit for purpose in the era of globalization takes the stage.

### *Challenges*

A qualitative transformation in the nature of global capitalism was discernable in the 1990's. The multinational corporations became increasingly disconnected from the 'real economy' and became truly global. The transport and communications revolution gestating through the 1970's and 1980's greatly speeded up trade and all economic transactions. Of course the removal of the alternative economic model of state socialism and the exhaustion of the national economic development model in the South cleared the way for the one true economic

model of neo-liberal globalization to become the new common sense of the epoch.

While capitalism in the so-called Golden Era of the post Second World War period was primarily national, now the transnationalisation of economic, political and social relations ushered in a new era. What Karl Polanyi had foreseen at the start of this period was that unregulated market mechanisms would inevitably lead to the world becoming 'one world market'. What its neo-liberal turn in the late 1980's allowed for was precisely this outcome. Capitalism entered into a period of great dynamism, the 'animal spirits' of the financial markets were given free rein and the much vaunted gains of workers in the West were under severe threat. For Manuel Castells, in a major treatise on the new global economy, the effect on labour was quite clear: 'Torn by internationalisation of finance and production, unable to adapt to networking of firms and individualisation of work, and challenged by the engendering of employment, the labour movement fades away as a major source of social cohesion and workers representation' (Castells 1997:354). While these challenges were and are undoubtedly real, the labour movement was able to reinvent itself and take on the complex challenges of globalization as we argue in the second half of this piece.

Globalisation clearly signaled the end of 'business as usual' by the labour movement and it has generated a whole range of innovative responses as well as a steadily increasing flow of critical analysis (see Munck 2002; Harrod and O'Brien 2002; Silver 2003; Phelan 2006; Broffenbrenner 2007; Stevis and Boswell 2008; Webster, Lambert and Bezuidenhout 2008; Bieler, Lindberg and Pillay 2008; and Huws 2008). This flourishing of innovation has been seen at the local, national, regional and global levels. Sometimes the turn has been pragmatic and sometimes advances have been only partial, which we would expect from an uneven development perspective. However, we could now in the main agree that globalisation has opened up as many doors as it has closed for labour. We must also realise that labour responses at the global level are not in a zero-sum relationship with other national or local responses. There is no 'one best way' (as Taylorism claimed to be) for labour responses to globalization, where flexibility is the only given. The Dutch trade unions have argued persuasively for the type of 'innovative trade union strategies' needed today to contest neo-liberal globalisation: 'it will involve organising new groups hitherto under-represented in the movement, local and transnational actions, a clear orientation towards social justice and coalitions with community groups and, last but not least, a vigorous engagement in the battle of ideas in terms of a vision for an alternative social order' (Kloosterboer 2007: 2-13). Of course, implementing this vision in practice is not so simple; it requires 'buy in' and a change of mind sets at all levels of the workers movement.

At the end of the twentieth century international trade unionism was confronted by a tragic paradox.<sup>1</sup> There were more wage earners than ever before, around three billion according to Freeman (2006). The new International Congress of Trade Unions (ITUC) and Global Union Federations together have more than 150 million members and cover more countries, unions and workers than ever before. This was due to the incorporation of most of the formerly communist and national-populist unions. But neo-liberal globalisation implied the simultaneous weakening of traditional unionism's century-old national-industrial base, the shift of that base to countries of the South (particularly China), the undermining of traditional job security and union rights, and the decline or disappearance of support from social-democratic parties, social-reformist governments and the most powerful inter-state agencies. Moreover, the unions were being confronted with a fact that – ensconced in their industrial, national or industrial-relations cocoons – they had never previously felt it necessary to face: in this globalising world of labour

maybe only one worker in 18 was unionised. Finally, with the disappearance of their competitors in Communist or national-populist unions, the ICFTU/GUFs found themselves not only in an alien and hostile world but ideologically disoriented. Previously it had been able to see itself not only as representing the most advanced union model but as part of the 'free West', opposed to both Communist and national-populist unionism. Now it found itself left behind by the globalisation of capital and the decreasing political interest of the international hegemons.

If the union internationals initially responded in equal measure with disorientation and retreat, they are now increasingly raising the old notion of 'social partnership' with capital and state from the national to the global level. This has implied a series of specific campaigns, addressed sometimes directly to multinational corporations, sometimes to the international financial institutions and other promoters of globalisation such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Economic Forum and so forth. Over the years, the global union federations have established an ongoing social dialogue with a number of multinational enterprises in their sectors or industries (Justice, 2002: 96). The three major areas of this union work are international labour standards, codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility policies (Jenkins, Pearson and Seyfang 2002). Such voluntary global social contracts have been presented on a slightly more public stage by union endorsement of the UN's Global Compact. This is another voluntary initiative, aiming to 'mainstream' socially responsible business activities through policy dialogues, learning and other local projects. Union support for the Global Compact, even though the initiative lacked the power of enforcement or even monitoring, was revealed in a joint UN-ICFTU/GU declaration in 2000:

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

More recently we have seen union co-sponsorship of the ILO's World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation which has published a report on *Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities for All*. From the perspective of the great financial fall that began in autumn 2008 this perspective seems extremely limited and self-limiting indeed. When the theoretical organs of the financial bourgeoisie such as the *Financial Times* and *The Economist* openly proclaim the end of self regulating market capitalism it does seem too radical to call for 'fair' globalization.

While such efforts suggest a reorientation in reaction to globalisation, international trade unions are also continuing their traditional efforts at union building, in defence of labour rights and in support of workers and unions internationally (see Fairbrother and Hammer 2005 for a review). This seems to involve new and more assertive language. An exemplar might be the International Transport Workers Federation, the 2002 Congress of which was devoted to the theme of 'Globalising Solidarity'. A turning point in its practical solidarity activity is indicated by, on the one hand, its failure to effectively support the Liverpool dock workers during the major lockout of 1995-8 and its more effective support for the Australian dock workers during a related dispute later. But much national and international union solidarity activity is still carried out under the rubric of 'development co-operation' and financed by the state or inter-state organisations. At other times such activity is combined with union-to-union or worker-to-worker

solidarity, as possibly with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU Global Solidarity). It is, however, notable that most of this solidarity appears to be in a North-South direction. A more holistic, multi-faceted and multi-directional notion of labour solidarity is yet to emerge, and the ICTU website reveals only an implicit recognition of the broader global solidarity movement.

However, what the historical parallels of the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the contemporary union movement teach us is that this necessary shift will not be smooth and organic. It is more likely that alternative social forces (the 'informal sector' for example) and new geographical locations (China, India and the global South more generally) will challenge and subvert the current structures and strategies. What is clear is that the accelerated accumulation of capital generated by globalization has produced a massively increased global proletariat in the classical Marxist sense in China and India in particular. While perhaps up to twenty million of these new workers lost their jobs in China following the financial crisis of 2008 they have utterly transformed the nature of the global working class. The first issue of *Global Labour Journal* (edited by Bowles and Harriss, 2010) was rightly dedicated to the complex pattern of capitalist recomposition and labour activation in China and India. There would appear to be no generalized patterns of resistance or acquiescence across either country. Most contributors to this special issue stress uneven development of labour resistance and agree that whatever backlash there has been, particularly in rural areas to this massive process of proletarianisation, we cannot refer to a generalized civil society counter-movement. On the contrary, one of the editors argues that, 'rather than resistance from below what is most striking [is] a counter-movement from above' (Harriss 2010: 5) whereby the state seeks to carry out a preventative Polanyian-style counter to the effects of an untrammelled free market based expansion. Clearly the emerging working class in these two very different countries faces huge challenges including increased informalisation and, in due course the rise of legalism in labour relations which may serve to disarm and co-opt the nascent labour movement.

When these new labour formations emerge they are necessarily subject to the challenges of routinisation and what was called the 'iron law of oligarchy' which leads to bureaucratization and a certain accommodation with the powers that be. Two national labour movements with a practically iconic status in the 1980's labour studies were those of Brazil and South Africa. In Brazil the trade unions in the core industrial areas were the key players in the democratization process which began in the mid 1970's. In the 1990's they ... were the backbone of a political movement which elected the first worker president of Brazil, 'Lula' da Silva, one time leader of the metalworkers union. Since the mid 1990's the undoubted political legitimacy of the unions has to be balanced against their largely defensive role in the face of industrial restructuring. The dramatic increase in outsourcing and subcontracting has not been met by dynamic union organizing. Political representation through the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers Party) has become a double edged sword as the latter is seen to be presiding over a government which has not delivered on its promises. While their membership of the ICFTU since 1992 has helped promote South-South labour relations, in Brazil the unions have become compromised by their support for the government.

In South Africa the transition from opposition to integral part of the state machinery has been even more dramatic insofar as there were widespread expectations of a non capitalist future prior to the transition in the 1990's. While the trade union movement rejects the accusation that it has become the representative of a small minority of privileged workers it has, undoubtedly, compromised with state power, most noticeably in relation to economic policy. It has been no

more successful than its Brazilian counterparts in terms of organising the informal/casual work sector. Its own deliberations admit to a problem of increased bureaucratisation and oligarchy within the union federation (Pillay 2009: 59). The Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU), modeled on the successful Indian organization Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has argued forcefully that South African unions need to face the challenge of industrial restructuring and declining membership by reaching out to the vast layers of 'non-traditional' workers to create a new social movement oriented unionism. A sober appraisal would, however, point to the very limited ability shown to date to meet that challenge.

Moving from the national to the transnational domain I will end this section with a consideration of the challenge posed by labour migration for a number of reasons. First of all it is an issue which causes severe discomfort for neo-liberal thought. Its one-time guru Milton Friedman is reported to have said that, 'About migration the least said the better'. This is understandable because there appears to be no logical reason why if capital, investment and ideas should flow freely across national frontiers then why not labour. At present free international mobility is only granted to a very small elite of professional workers when their skills are required in the affluent countries. For the mass of the world's workers national borders are, if anything, less permeable in the so-called era of globalisation than in the past. Migration is securitised and the full panoply of state surveillance and repression falls on those who take globalisation at its word and go off to improve their situation. Despite some tentative international discussions about the need for a World Migration Organisation on a par with the WTO to regulate migration, it is most likely to remain as a messy and fuzzy issue for the managers of global capitalism. Could it be an opportunity for the social counter-movement now challenging the undisputed role of the unregulated market?

Historically the trade union movement has also had severe difficulties in dealing with migration in a way which accorded with its basic principles. Labour activists and analysts imbued with the spirit of labour internationalism too often forget how workers draw on non-class forms of identity to protect themselves from the maelstrom of capitalist restructuring. While capital may well treat labour as an undifferentiated commodity workers invariably find bonds of gender, place and race to create solidarity around in their struggle to keep some kind of advantage in the chaos caused by modernisation/globalisation. For Giovanni Arrighi: 'As a consequence, patriarchalism, racism and national-chauvinism have been integral to the making of the world labour movement' (Arrighi 1990: 93). This is a history often overlooked in the annals of the official trade union movement (and its critics for that matter) which tend to airbrush out the sexism, racism and xenophobia which forms an integral element of most labour movements. To recognise it is, perhaps, the first step on the way to dealing with it, rather than relying on anodyne stories of solidarity and internationalism.

There is perhaps a compelling argument that 'solidarity with migrant workers is helping trade unions to get back to the basic principles of the labour movement' (David, nd). On the one hand trade unions have been facing a crisis of declining membership and influence over the last two decades. On the other hand many social and political organisations find themselves bereft of leadership on the question of migration. From either side of the argument therefore trade unions have now an opportunity as well as a challenge. Across the world trade unions are organising with and on behalf of migrant workers (see Kahman 2002; Gray 2007 and Wrench 2004). Trade unions have made common cause with migrant-led associations and with NGOS supporting migrant workers and they have also sought to directly organise migrants ('workers are workers are

workers' is a common slogan). Of course one effect of this drive is to minimise the ability of employers to use migrant workers to undercut pay and conditions for indigenous workers. Nevertheless, its net impact, as David puts it, is that, 'in response to economic globalisation, trade unions are organising the globalisation of solidarity in defence of migrants' (David, nd: 74).

In the years to come international labour migration is bound to become more important both in quantitative terms but also in qualitative terms, because it may pose a defining point for the trade union movement. One such 'tipping point' was the Irish Ferries dispute in Ireland in 2005 (see Krings 2007). A well-unionised cross-channel seafaring group was faced by a cost-cutting employer who decided that Latvian agency workers who could be paid half the legal minimum wage made good economic sense. The Irish trade union movement was shaken to its very foundations and rumours abounded about the imminent displacement of native workers by cheaper foreign imports. Very soon this dispute became a test case not least because it involved Ireland's largest trade union SIPTU (the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union). Mass mobilisations occurred and the employers were forced to negotiate by a government committed to social partnership. Nevertheless the nativist reaction was just under the surface; in one mass mobilisation official banners with 'no slave ships in the Irish sea' jostled with other calling for 'Irish jobs for Irish workers'. In the end the Irish labour movement made the improvement of conditions for migrant workers a 'deal breaker' in the next round of partnership talks. Equalising the conditions of labour upwards won over the temptation to blame the 'non-national' workers brought in by employers.

### *Responses*

There have been, over the last decade, a number of coherent responses to the challenges of globalisation both from above and from below as it were. In terms of achieving stable global governance it had become clear by around 2000 that unless globalisation achieved a 'human face' it was not sustainable. Thus the World Bank became concerned with establishing a 'safety net' to protect those excluded from the basic means to a livelihood by the free-marketisation implicit in globalisation. Even the much-vaunted Washington Consensus which set the tone for the 1990s in terms of an economic policy centred around privatisation, marketisation and liberalisation, was subject to an internal critique and revision. All of these reforms from above were designed to make globalisation more palatable, but not really to change its fundamentals. In relation to the world of work it was the International Labour Organisation which in 1999 created a new paradigm through its overarching strategy to achieve 'decent work'. Decent work was conceived as the main underpinning for social and economic progress in the era of globalisation and the vehicle for delivering the aspirations of people in their working lives.

The International Labour Office (ILO) was set up in 1919 to promote labour standards and embed the economy in society. In Polanyian terms it would take labour out of the market place where it could be bought and sold like any other commodity. The ILO would set labour standards designed for varying national system of regulation. These would help regulate the national labour markets and offer protection for employees. These were assumed to be in stable full-time employment and predominantly male. There was also an explicit assumption that the Western European model of 'social partnership' was universal. This was the labour policy for the Keynesian era based on full-employment and the efficacy of macro-economic policy

management. All this was to change in the late 1970s as Keynesianism was swept aside by the neo-liberal revolution. By the mid 1980s even in the European heartlands the ILO world had collapsed. Unemployment was rife, and the crisis of 'competitiveness' was blamed on the social model, including the protective regulation at the core of the ILO's *raison d'être* and the nefarious interference of collective bargaining institutions seen as distorting the market.

In the late 1980s the ILO played a modest role during the disintegration of the Soviet system through the promotion of a social market model against the free-market fundamentalists. However, in the 1990s as globalisation and labour market flexibility became dominant the ILO began to lose direction. The Decent Work campaign was designed to overcome this crisis and at one level it has become widely accepted, at least at official level. Concerned to present Decent Work as a non-ideological issue, the ILO seems to have lost any sense of vision. As a campaign it is even a step back from the historic ILO 'labour directives' now subsumed under vague rubrics which are part of international law anyway such as the prohibition of child labour. The main problem is that the world of 2009 is not the world of 1919 or even 1969 when the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize. As Guy Standing puts it: 'The ILO was set up as a means of legitimizing labourism, a system of employer-employee relations based on the standard employment relationship, and a means of taking labour out of international trade' (Standing 2008: 380). Tripartite labour relations are hardly dominant, the standard employment relationship survives only in small pockets, and labour is quite starkly a commodity on the global labour market.

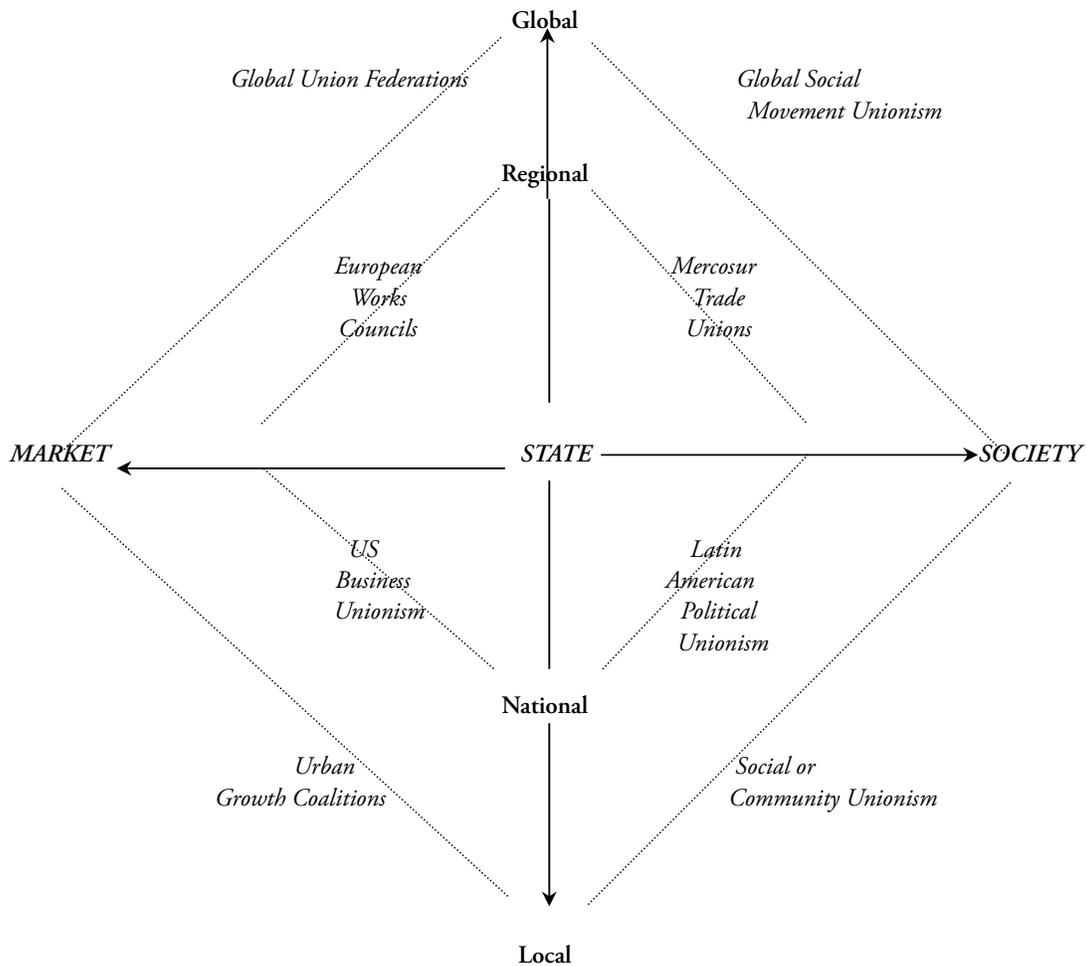
We could argue that 'decent work' is better for most workers than a 'race to the bottom'. Certainly it is motivated by a reformist urge but we can still question whether it is, or can be, a transformative labour movement project. Peter Waterman has characterised the Decent Work campaign as 'backward-looking utopianism' (Waterman 2008). It certainly is premised on a world of nation states and orderly industrial relations which is either dying or never existed in most of the world. It is also Utopian in the sense that it is premised on the myth of a golden era of social harmony, which even in the imperial heartlands was not usually that real. Even so we might ask whether Decent Work could play a role for 'poverty reduction and a fair and inclusive globalization' (ILO, 2008) as its proponents argue. Here, however, we need to be skeptical because of the inherent weakness of the ILO compared to the trio of global governance managers in the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. Global governance must promote a 'human face' for its essentially neo-liberal project if it is to be seen as legitimate. However, the capital accumulation project and the social legitimation drive are, of course, part and parcel of an overall programme of capitalist modernisation detrimental to labour.

If the ILO's Decent Work campaign is unlikely to deliver a decisive breakthrough for the workers of the world what is the potential of the organised labour movement itself? We should start from the basis that labour is set within a context of global complexity in which no simplistic response is likely to have much purchase. We also appear to be in a transitional situation described generically by Gramsci for an earlier transition era when 'the old is dying but the new has not yet been fully born' (Gramsci 1971: 106). Clearly the old national-statist-corporatist model is no longer hegemonic but what will emerge from the current period of global turmoil is not entirely settled either. There are also many contradictions within the global working class, not least the divisions based on their social and geographical positioning within the global division of labour. It is crucial therefore to understand the nature of its complexity of the pressures coming to bear on workers and their organisations.

We can start to answer these questions through interrogation of a fairly basic diagram

with a social horizontal axis and a spatial vertical axis that seeks to map the complex parameters of labour organization and repertoires of collective action.

*Figure 1: The socio-spatial parameters of labour movement repertoires*



*Source: author*

The horizontal axis presents two poles of attraction affecting labour organizations, namely the market and society. As Karl Polanyi proposed, the expansion of the free market (left-hand side) is countered by society (right-hand side) which always seeks to (re)embed the market in social relations. The state lies in between both these poles and plays a key role in either promoting free market policies or protecting society, or doing both at the same time of course. The vertical axis represents the spatial scale of human activity from the local (bottom), through the national (and nation-state) and regional levels to the newly influential global scale (top). These levels are not meant to be seen as a hierarchy in any way and probably cannot be taken in

separation from the horizontal market/society poles of attraction. In terms of what this panorama means for labour and other social movements we can hypothesise a new more complex spatial/social matrix which sets the terrain for labour repertoires of action. It is not a question of choosing where to position strategies in a simplistic manner but, more, of understanding the implications of where organizations are situated in the diamond. We might, however, be able to locate pressure points where labour leverage might be more effective and where flexible strategies can be created. Above all it shows, I think, the need to 'make connections' between different labour repertoires, too often living in a world of their own.

Starting with the top left-hand corner we can posit that the new Global Union Federations are market-oriented global level organisations. The international trade unions represent workers in their market role and seek improve their bargaining power as sellers of labour-power. Going counter-clockwise to the top right quadrant the various global social movement unions such as for example *Via Campesina* are global-level organisations embedded in and oriented towards society. Then in the bottom right-hand quadrant we can see the myriad of local community-level union type movements such as for example those at the start of labour organizing in South Africa in the 1970s. Many of the Polanyian style counter movements in the era of globalization were based locally with a mission to protect society from the effects of the unregulated free market. Going round to the bottom-left hand quadrant we have local market-oriented urban growth coalitions where trade unions may ally with local employers and government in pursuit of local interests. Many city level trade union movements enter into 'boosterist' alliances with capital and the local state in pursuit of a city agenda both in the North and in the global South.

In terms of the inner diamond we can see how national-level trade unions may take up the economic or business unionism approach which once epitomised US trade unionism. That is clearly a market oriented paradigm. They may also, however, develop a political unionism oriented towards the state as potential benefactor as traditionally they did in Latin America. The regional dimension – too often neglected in analysis of labour and globalisation – can also take a more market orientation as labour does in Europe or it can move towards the social or state direction as they tend to do in Latin America. Also we can see how SIGTUR (Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights) acts as a more social movement oriented regional level labour organization. So if we take the diamond diagram as a whole and interpret it in a dynamic way we can see how complex the array of possible labour strategies is. This can only act as a heuristic device to plot the possible strategies or combination of strategies that labour might deploy. It is simply seeking to articulate the complexity of choices and dilemmas facing labour in the era of globalization as it responds to the challenges outlined in the previous section. Again it points to the pressing need to 'make connection' within the labour universe but also outside with other local/social/regional/nationalist/etc movements

Now, in terms of building on this picture and articulating an overall perspective we could simply argue that the new capitalism creates new types of workers and hence a new unionism will inevitably emerge. This would be closely modeled on the way in which the 'new social movements' and the World Social Forum organise. Put most simply, a networked society (Castells 1996) will call forth a networked unionism. As a more democratic form of coordination it has certainly captured the imagination of some parts of the broad labour movement but that is clearly a minority. There are many national, sectoral and ideological divisions to be overcome. Nor does the old labour movement problem of routinisation and bureaucracy disappear that easily. Organisation – of the unorganised and of the trade union and wider labour movements –

is still an imperative. Many of the old problems still remain despite the much-vaunted arrival of a new capitalism. For example, we should probably need to reconsider the growing emphasis on the global domain to the detriment of the national. As Gay Seidman argued recently: 'Instead of boycotting brands, transnational strategies might look for strategies to push governments to strengthen labor law enforcement' (Seidman 2008: 142). The new capitalism is underpinned by some remarkably traditional nation-states and capitalist classes in practice.

However there is growing evidence of trade unions taking up a social movement orientation and not only in the global South. There are signs that trade unions are looking towards the new social movements for alliances and maybe as a source of renewal and revitalization. In the USA, as Dan Clawson shows: 'Labor's links with other [social movement] groups are denser and stronger than they have been for half a century' (2003: 205), and this interaction has led to new, more progressive policies for example, in relation to undocumented immigrants. Thus in the very heartland of capitalism the business unionism model has been challenged increasingly in the 1990's by a social justice or social movement unionism well described by Vanessa Tate (2005). The increasing weight of the informal economy more or less forced US trade unions to take up a broader orientation and they thus began to take 'the form of a multifaceted political movement not limited to issues such as wages and benefits' (Tate 2005: 8). Those in the informal sector were poor but they were also workers albeit often of a contingent status that deemed them 'hard to organise'. But as workers of colour and women workers had in the past they organized themselves and often forced mainstream trade unions to organize in these sectors. These poor people's movements often showed great degrees of inventiveness in period when the official labour movement was reeling from the organisational and ideological impact of neo-liberalism. They helped put the movement aspect back into the broader labour movement and broadened the trade union agenda to take up housing and health care issues and an understanding that fair pay was as important as more pay.

As Frances O'Grady, deputy general secretary of the British Trade Union Congress has put it succinctly: 'Growing globalisation has demonstrated ever more vividly that going it alone [for the unions] is not an option' (O'Grady 2004), and that not only do they need to engage seriously with the global justice movement, but if they wish to change the world they will need to start by changing themselves. There is little doubt that in the early 2000s international labour activity found considerable resonance and reached levels only dreamt of in the 1970s. Transnational communication and networking had become easier and many of the political obstacles had been overcome. But this need for internationalism had also, arguably, changed. As Asbjorn Wahl puts it 'after 30 years of neo-liberal deregulation, international co-ordination is much more of a must' (personal interview). On a whole range of issues now even the seemingly most localised struggle needs to adopt a global optic. Indeed, we could argue that there is a new local-global terrain which does not necessarily 'pass through' its national level. Local struggles may turn to transnational repertoires of actions directly. Fairbrother and Hamner have referred to the recent emergence of "a multi-faceted form of trade unionism", with different levels working to achieve recognition and an impact on international sectors and regions' (Fairbrother and Hamner 2005:418). We could also think of this more complex trade unionism as a multi-level response to globalisation which has impacted on workers at local, national and regional levels as well as at the transnational level.

It is, of course, highly debatable whether the international trade union movement has entirely overcome the structural and political impediments to full international labour solidarity.

For Kim Moody writing in the mid 1990s ‘official international labor at almost all levels appears inadequate to the changes taking place in the internationalizing economy and workplaces across the world’ (Moody 1997: 247). With the Global Union Federations at one remove from the workplace their solidarity campaigns appear remote. With most national unions still committed to an outdated concept of ‘partnership’ international solidarity is reduced to ritual. The only alternative for Moody – picking up on debates in the South during the 1980’s – ‘would be a global social movement unionism’ which would maximise working class power by embracing ‘the diversity of the working class in order to overcome its fragmentation’ (Moody 1997:290). Above all this perspective recognizes the social role of labour and the trade unions for too long confined to their economic and political roles. It would certainly be a challenge, though, to take this perspective which played a role in combating authoritarian regimes in the South by constructing a community unionism and ‘scaling it up’ to the global scale.

### ***Back to the Future***

While this is a piece concerned with the future, seeking out patterns of resistance by labour to the depredations of globalization and discerning new and emergent properties we should not ignore a historical perspective. When placing an emphasis on the new – be it capitalism, work or unionism – we can often neglect the value of looking to the past. Marco Berlinguer of *Lavoro in Movimento* argues that, ‘to recreate politics we need to rediscover labour’ (cited in Wainwright 2008: 3). This might entail going back to the formative stages of the labour movement before the consolidation of nation-states. What globalisation has undoubtedly generated is a potentially stronger workers’ movement than ever existed before. To generate a new labour politics fit-for-purpose in the era of globalisation involves, as Hilary Wainwright puts it, ‘a rethinking and reasserting of labour as social, co-operative process and itself potentially a commons’ (Wainwright 2008: 3). Several decades of boycott campaigns seeking to ‘name and shame’ renegade corporations have shown their limitations. The trend towards reconfiguring labour issues as human rights issues within a generic global civil society also seems to be running out of steam. Now is perhaps the time when an incipient global labour movement will begin to rediscover some of its original characteristics of combination, a common moral economy and an instinctive internationalism. In re-inventing and re-visioning the labour movement for the twenty-first century rich resources might be found in an earlier pre-national period when labour first burst on the scene with its call for a better world.

### **NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph draws from the jointly written piece by R. Munck and P. Waterman (2010). I have maintained a long and productive working dialogue with Peter Waterman and I am not always sure where my ideas and his begin and end.

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