

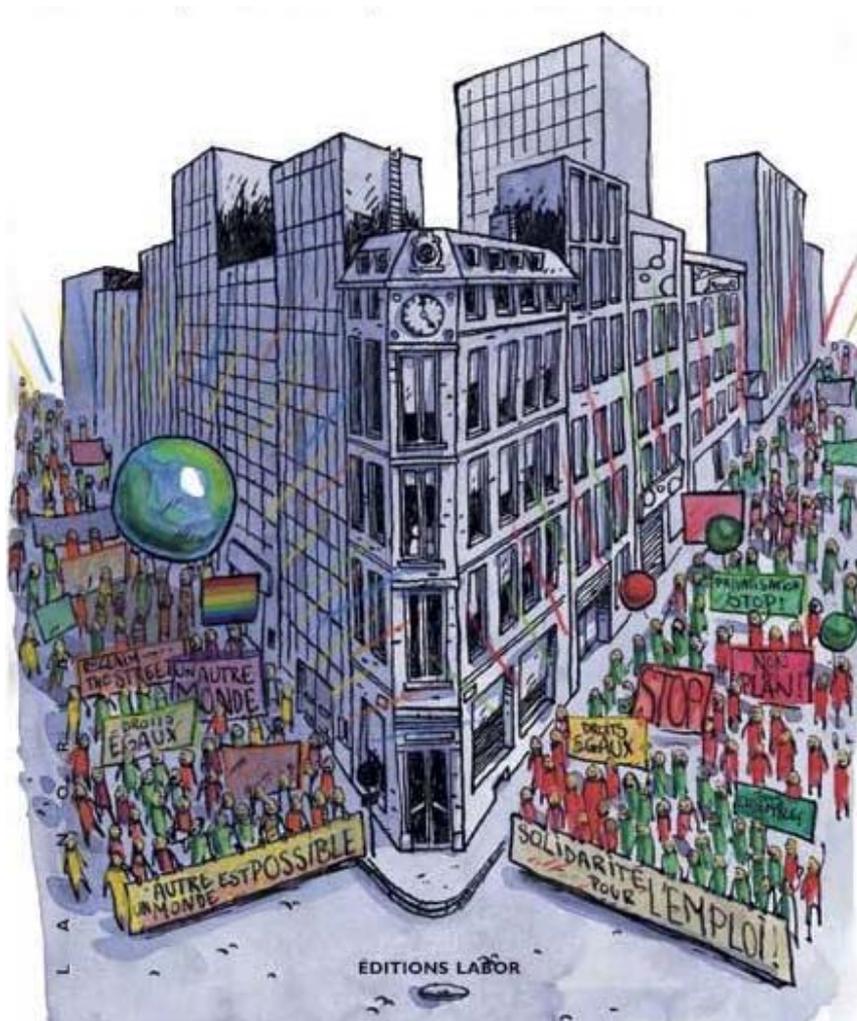
**Discussion Draft!!! Work in Progress!!!**

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# Work and/or Life?

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**Five years after this cover illustration, is meeting together enough?  
Source: Cover of Bellal et. al. (2003)**

*Although the presence of...transnational civil society at the heart of global governance may well be seen as a sign (or, at the same time, a test) of the resurgence of the community principle within a regulatory space which until now had been hegemonised by state and market principles, nevertheless it does not automatically signify an unequivocal rise in democratic and anti-hegemonic principles in relation to the traditional forms of inter-state governance...The so-called non-governmental world is profoundly heterogeneous and cannot compromise [satisfy?] itself with generalised affirmations of participation in this world as a whole, in a compassionate remoulding of internationalism*

**José Manuel Pureza (2008)**

### **Introduction: ‘Decent Work’ and/or the ‘Liberation of Life from Work’?**

This note will be more reflective and provocative (and personal) than informative. Others will have to compensate for its short- (or long-) comings.<sup>1</sup> Although I have customarily written on labour at or in World Social Forum events (e.g. Waterman 2007), and although the ESF in Malmo may have seen the best-ever union support and attendance, I was there hosted by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation <http://www.dhf.uu.se/default.html>, a think-tank more oriented toward international NGOs, democracy and global civil society (a subject I spoke on at a seminar it sponsored). So I only attended a couple of specifically labour events and the final Assembly of Social Movements.

In previous reports I have dwelt on the ambiguity of the union presence within WSF events – as also the ambiguity of labour initiatives *independent*<sup>2</sup> of the inter/national unions. The problem, as I see it, is one of whether the increasing presence of union organisations in particular or of pro-labour bodies more generally implies a significant shift in the inter/national unions from a defensive posture and one heavily compromised with capital and state, nationally or internationally, to one of a movement for the global emancipation of labour.

The matter is more theoretically posed in the quotation above (in which a certain ambiguity may result from the translation into English). So let me put it in terms familiar from the history of the labour movement. Is labour, by its participation in the WSF process moving from the Christian or Social-Liberal demand of ‘A Fair Day’s Wage for a Fair Day’s Work’ to the Socialist, Anarchist, Libertarian, Radical-Democratic or Autonomist one of ‘The Abolition of Wage-Slavery’. Today, as far as I am concerned, the former position is encapsulated in the call of the inter-state International Labour Organisation (ILO) for ‘Decent Work’. This has been adopted – lock, stock and two smoking barrels - by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The second is expressed best, perhaps, in the call of the libertarian socialist, Andre Gorz (1999), for ‘the

liberation of life from work' (see also Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wage\\_slavery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wage_slavery)).

### **Labour's presence: less than the sum of the parts?**

I have tried to mark up, in the weighty 68-page programme of the four-day ESF, the number of labour events. This is not so easy, given that even for the first full day, Thursday, September 18, there was a total of some 90-100 different activities, excluding the cultural ones. There is also the inevitable question of whether something is or is not a labour event. But I make it some 19 labour events for that one day. Which might suggest, over the four days, possibly 50. Most of these, moreover, were sponsored either by the inter/national union organisations, or by these along with one or other NGO/social movement. Moreover, a specific labour concern was one of the 10 major themes of the ESF: 'Building labour strategies for decent work and dignity for all – against precarity and exploitation'.

Now Decent Work (capitalised) is the major current slogan of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), as well as most national unions and union-friendly NGOs. Indeed, a World Day for Decent Work (WDDW) is scheduled for October 7, 2008. And the ETUC Chair, the Swedish Wanja Lundby-Wedin (2008), was one of the speakers at the ESF Inauguration. And the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (the LO) was a sponsor of the ESF, took a full-back-page advertisement in its programme, had a particular meeting place in Malmo and handed out to all comers red water bottles bearing the slogan 'Solidarity Works!'.

The labour events for the first day, Thursday, may give an impression of their breadth of concern throughout the ESF. I have indicated below with the @ symbol those *solely* sponsored by unions (plus their sponsored NGOs). The listing suggests that a *minority* were such specifically union initiatives. The situation should be compared with earlier WSF events in which the unions set up their own tents or even a whole area within the forum which might have identified but also isolated the unions. It is my impression, from the listing below, that the *labour* agenda at the ESF Malmo was rather broad and that the *union* agenda (as part thereof) has been widening :

1. Strategies and Mobilisations against the Attack on Labour Law in EU
2. Unregistered Immigrants
3. @ Migrant Workers and Workers without Papers from a Trade Union Perspective
4. Fighting Privatisation of Public Services – Struggles and Alternatives
5. The Labour Movement – How to Organise for the Future
6. Future Strategies of the Global Working Class
7. @ Promoting Social Cohesion and Preventing Exclusion
8. Trade Unions, Climate Change and Government Action
9. @ Effects of the Geopolitical Strategy of the EU with Latin American on Young People's Living and Working Conditions
10. Assembly against Poverty, Precarity and Unemployment
11. @Poverty in Europe
12. Fight for Professional and Labour Rights and Justice
13. Trade Union Solidarity Work in Practice – Global Framework Agreements for Decent Working Conditions

14. @ Connecting Young Workers and Fighting Multinationals – Global Organising
15. @ Decent Work and Sustainable Development: Challenges for Europe
16. @ Strategies for Partnership for Trade Unions Movement in Central and Eastern Europe and Russia
17. Building the Alternative Solidarity Economy
18. @ Trade Unions – A Part of a Democratic Society in Belarus
19. Radical Assembly on Precarity and Workplace Struggles

The two ‘alternative’ labour and globalisation networks active at the 2007 World Social Forum, Nairobi, merged their Malmö activities in two somewhat overlapping seminars on union strategy, national and international (one is No. 6 above). These two initiatives were a) the largely ‘South European’ initiative, associated with the Italian leftist activist, Marco Berlinguer, and left union officer, Alessandra Mecozzi, and b) the largely ‘North European’ network, connected with the leftist international labour specialists, Andreas Bieler and Ingemar Lindberg. Both networks coordinate unions on the one hand with NGOs and social movements on the other. And, perhaps, these provided the force behind the final declaration on the ‘social issue’. I say this simply because, on the one hand, that final declaration says nothing about the official international union Decent Work campaign. And, on the other hand, it does not reflect the ‘Radical Assembly on Precarity and Workplace Struggles’. This radical alternative was listed in the printed programme and promoted by persons unknown, at least to me. It appealed to participants to

Share your experiences on combating the daily exploitation on your workplace. Talk with and meet others in a precarious work situation from different countries and exchange ideas, smart tactics or conspire how to overthrow capitalism. A collective enquiry on experiences from working inside base unions, ‘official’ unions or from extra-union struggles, informal workplace collectives, flying squads, external supportive collectives, generalised strikes and other methods developed to fit the need of a precarious workforce. Can there exist a intersection or hybrid between social movement activism and union struggle? What common ground exists between paperless migrants, unemployed and students as sections of a precarious workforce, paid and unpaid ‘female’ work and other forms and methods of struggle from the invisible workers of the world. (ESF Programme 2008).

Not only was this event proposed by persons unknown, but I was not present to find out whether it actually took place! This is somewhat to my regret, given my sympathy for the orientation suggested and the questions raised.

But, then, I also missed other labour sites or events (for some of which see Permanent Revolution 2008). And I am not therefore sure whether we got feedback from the precarious, the youth, the working women, or the other ‘invisible workers of the world’. Perhaps the closest I came to such was when the veteran South African socialist-feminist, Pat Horn, reported on StreetNet <http://www.streetnet.org.za/english/default.htm>, an international network of street traders and petty-producers that might claim to have squared the circle by retaining organisation/network independence whilst having close relations with the traditional union organisations and the ILO. She told her story, if I rightly recall, also in event No. 6, above. What I fear is that the multiple labour events and concerns never amounted to a whole more than a sum of its parts. And that – given

the fragmented nature of WSF events – we will not even get more than the kind of fragmentary account I am giving here.

### **Labour's final act: necessary but insufficient?**

*The ESF is the great forum of 'talking past' or 'talking at' one another – the political diversity amongst the participants, from social democratic NGOs to environmentalist hippies to revolutionary Marxists makes it difficult to find a common denominator. But the functioning of the forum and especially the final assembly makes it completely impossible. The final declaration is not decided by a democratic vote, but rather presented by a more or less self-appointed preparation group and then rubber-stamped with 'consensus'. The text contains bullet points to satisfy nearly all of the participants, but no concrete mobilisation plans. After years of noncommittal chatting, many are wondering what the use of the whole event is...*

### **Permanent Revolution (2008)**

What labour participation in the ESF in Malmo eventually boiled down to was its contribution to the now-traditional declaration of the Assembly of Social Movements. The ASM, for those unfamiliar with the WSF, is a structure or process *within* social forums that issues policy or strategy declarations, thus circumventing the formal WSF principle that it is a space for discussion, rather than for proposing or organising action. But the ASM is hardly itself ultra-radical. In addition to the shortcomings identified in the quote above, it more or less limits itself to listing which demonstrations we should take part in during the coming period. Within the more general declaration of the Assembly, that on 'the social issue' proposed that

We launch immediately a COMMON EUROPEAN CAMPAIGN against UE social and labour policies, first to oppose specifically the EU directive on working time and UE decision on migrant labour. This campaign will have different steps (ex: December the 6th in Paris) and includes the objective of a massive joint mobilisation at European level as soon as possible. As a second step, we build up a large, inclusive and strategic conference/counter-summit of all the European social movement, in Brussels in March. <http://www.esf2008.org/news/final-declaration-of-the-assembly-of-social-movements-2009-to-change-europe>

In my recollection of the Assembly, the labour contribution was actually rather longer and more detailed. But even thus boiled down, the stand on the 'social issue' (a 19<sup>th</sup> century European formulation of the labour-capital conflict) is not empty of significance. The castigated initiatives of the EU - to dramatically extend working hours and to take a common position against labour migrants - are directed at historically-established labour standards and against an understanding of workers as a global community rather than as competing state-nationals.<sup>1</sup> What preceded this, moreover, was a series of seminars and workshops, attended or even sponsored by union organisations as much as by

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<sup>1</sup> For the significance of the EU attack on collective bargaining, see Johansson (2008).

independent labour initiatives. And what is implied is a joint union and social movement convergence as suggested by the illustration that introduces this paper.

### **Five minutes of fame (or not) for a Global Labour Charter Project**

My own motive or justification for going to yet another WSF event (which I continue to find stimulating and disorienting in equal measure)<sup>3</sup>, was to promote my Global Labour Charter Project. It is herewith appended, with a bunch of resources, to the end of this report. I have been quite impressed by the breadth and depth of *disinterest* in this idea since I first launched it two or three years ago. Yes, I know this is the likely fate of any kind of exotic idea proposed by an individual academic (retired), who has kept a distance from, and even criticised, not only the hegemonic trade union organisations but even the alternative labour bodies, such as those mentioned above.

On the other hand (and there is always another hand)...

Some 20 years ago I similarly launched the idea of ‘social movement unionism’. This now has some 12,500 hits on Google, of which no more than 6,250 can possibly be mine. SMU actually went off in several different directions, several of which I disagreed with (Waterman 2004). But the notion of an intimate articulation between union organisations and the new(est) social movements is now part of international union thinking and practice – as witnessed in Malmo this September and to be demonstrated in Oslo, mid-October <http://www.itfglobal.org/news-online/index.cfm/newsdetail/2587>. It may even recur in the international socialist initiative, proposed by the World Forum of Alternatives (associated with Samir Amin) and hosted, also mid-October, by President Hugo Chavez in Caracas [http://www.forumdesalternatives.org/EN/viewpage.php?page\\_id=7&banner\\_id=5](http://www.forumdesalternatives.org/EN/viewpage.php?page_id=7&banner_id=5)! Such union-social movement articulations, finally, are a growing focus of labour studies (see [http://www.ith.or.at/konf\\_e/zeitpl\\_2003\\_e.htm](http://www.ith.or.at/konf_e/zeitpl_2003_e.htm), Waterman 2005).

It was the success of the SMU initiative which initially inspired me to produce my Global Labour Charter. The response to the GLC, however, even by friends and comrades, has been at best polite. Within the two Malmo activities organised directly by the ‘alternative’ labour and globalisation networks, I was granted my five minutes of fame. I was neither surprised nor disappointed by this limited show of interest. Indeed, I had prepared myself for this by printing off teeny-weeny visiting cards with the relevant URL addresses for the hypothetically interested. The GLC starts like this:

The idea of a Global Labour Charter Movement comes out of both desperation and hope. The desperation is due to seeing the labour movement, in North, South, East or West, *still* on the defensive due to (despite?) the severe, multiple and continuing attacks delivered by contemporary capitalism. Not only has the union movement largely forgotten its early emancipatory inspiration and utopian hopes. Even the old adage that ‘the best means of defence is attack’ seems unfamiliar to labour’s international leadership. [...] Hope comes from seeing new energy and vision within the global justice and solidarity movement (GJ&SM), for example in the international rural labour movement, Via Campesina. Despite all the imaginable difficulties confronting the self-organisation of rural labour, this body has developed a holistic vision of its social

position, of its enemies, of an alternative future. It has demonstrated assertive global strategies and sophisticated relational practices (internal and external) that have made it a leading actor in the GJ&SM and led to widespread public recognition and support... Hope also comes from signs of assertion and innovation closer to the traditional labour movement, and from new thinking within and about such. As well as from efforts to specify a necessary and desirable post-capitalist utopia – and how it might be reached. <http://www.netzwerkit.de/projekte/waterman/gc>

I have to assume that the lack of appeal of the GLC - to either the right or the left of international unionism - is due to 1) its direct criticism of the international union hegemony, *or* 2) its finding of inspiration in labour movements beyond such, *or* 3) its failure to consider the unions as the primary agents of labour's self-emancipation, *or* 4) its utopianism. Or all four. In other words, for its being right off the traditional labour and socialist radar screen.<sup>4</sup> Which means that even my closest labour and socialist friends and comrades seem not to know how to respond to the proposal. In this limbo even condemnation would be welcome, especially if argued for. Please!?

### **What's unionism without a utopia?**

*Our decades-old inheritance...is that of the subordination of distinctive searches for means of emancipation to the logic of territorial, state-centred segmentation. The alliance between state and market principles, and between the nation and the economy, relegates the promise of an international community conceived of in lay terms as the super-imposition of horizontal citizen relationships onto hierarchical inter-state relations to the status of the 'unrealistic' and the 'utopian' and, therefore, the marginal. The restrictedly national character of the processes involved in constructing the Welfare State constitutes a consolidation, on a social level, of the dynamics of the international political fragmentation that began in Westphalia [birthplace/name of modern Western inter-state relations, 1648. PW]. International solidarity, barely tested as the embryo of an alternative to this dynamic, eventually converged on itself and was made redundant.*

**José Manuel Pureza (2008)**

It is my belief – and experience at the WSF - that organised unionism internationally has long lost any sense of 'another possible world' beyond capitalism. The same is true for most of the union *left*.<sup>5</sup> So the best these are able to reach for is either a pragmatic and defensive *reaction* to aggressive capitalist attack, or a return to a utopia of the national-industrial-capitalist past – the capitalist welfare state. The first is suggested in the Assembly of Social Movements declaration above, the second in Theme 10 of the ESF, also quoted above. What I think we are left with after Malmo is the *hope* that something radical will develop from the bringing together of labour and social movements either at conferences on this topic or at the promised demonstrations. Or, I suppose, that the international Decent Work campaign might debouch onto a more profound questioning of and challenge to capitalism.

However one 19<sup>th</sup> century socialist tradition has it that

*A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.*

**Oscar Wilde (1891)**

This positive valuing of utopian thinking has been revived for the global justice and solidarity movement by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who somewhere says that, confronted by a global capitalist dystopia, we are *condemned* to being utopian. And who says of the WSF that it

signifies the re-emergence of critical utopia, that is, of a radical critique of present-day reality and the aspiration to a better society. This occurs, however, when the anti-utopian utopia of neoliberalism is dominant. The utopian dimension of the WSF consists in affirming the possibility of a counter-hegemonic globalisation; it is a radically democratic utopia. In this sense, the utopia of the WSF asserts itself more as negativity (the definition of what it critiques) than as positivity (the definition of that to which it aspires). The specificity of the WSF as critical utopia has one more explanation [aspect? PW]. For the WSF, the claim of alternatives is plural, both as to the form of the claim and the content of the alternatives. The other possible world is a utopian aspiration that comprises several possible worlds. It may be many things, but never a world with no alternative. (Santos 2004)

Boa's formulation of utopia, be it noted, expresses itself in terms of *negation* and *possibility*. Which leaves open, likewise, the possibility that the ESF/WSF might prefer to overemphasise negation of the capitalist dystopia (neo-liberalism), and that the possibility of surpassing *capitalism* may be unrealised or blunted (a global neo-Keynesianism). I think that this is still where we are with the 'social question' following Malmo.

The point remains that without an explicit utopia (or several in dialogue) – without having one foot in a non-existing but possible and attractive alternative to capitalism – critics and opponents are condemned to playing the role of Sisyphus, of constantly rolling their rock up a hill and then seeing it roll down again (one thinks of the historically-achieved European labour rights, or the Welfare State, currently lying beneath the rock of palaeo-liberal globalisation).

### **What's a (dialogical) GLC got to do with an (elitist) 5th International?**

The sole enthusiast for my GLC Project in Malmo was the previously-mentioned Samir Amin of the World Forum of Alternatives. This was something of an embarrassment, given my openly-expressed criticism with what I have considered to be Amin's elitism, vanguardism and thirdworldism (Waterman 2007). Amin's 'Bamako Appeal' [http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read\\_article.php?article\\_Id=66](http://www.openspaceforum.net/twiki/tiki-read_article.php?article_Id=66) is, however, an explicit challenge to the WSF's founding belief that Open Space is All. It is also an implicit challenge to the ASM's notion that 'social movement' = 'protest

demonstration'. For such reasons I also welcomed it. Indeed, I thought that the Bamako Appeal's chapter on labour had more bite than anything else that had come out of either the WSF process or the ASM. At the Nairobi WSF, early 2007, moreover, I had the feeling that Amin and his colleague, the thirdworldist Belgian priest, Francois Houtart, were in fact adapting to the dialogical culture of the WSF. An indication of this might be their willingness to take part in a seminar on the Bamako Appeal organised by the editors of a 500-page compilation extensively critical of it (Sen and Kumar 2007)!

Moreover, we have to come to terms with the apparent paradox of Samir Amin being a source of inspiration for, and providing the introduction to, a decidedly non-vanguardist compilation produced by the 'North European' network I mentioned above (Bieler, Lindberg and Pillay 2008).<sup>6</sup> Since Nairobi, however, I have also noted not only the WFA's continuing identification with Southern anti-imperialist states, as with Venezuela and Hugo Chavez. But also Samir's to a 21<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of 19<sup>th</sup> century International.

However, I had already before Malmo decided that I should explore the nature and possibilities of the World Forum of Alternatives' Caracas conference. And Samir's enthusiastic response to my GLC project has required me to reflect on the possibilities of a WFA that, whilst dependent on state funding from a new Southern populist anti-imperialist state might have – simply because of its independence from old European social-reformist unionism and state-financing – the capacity to think and say things on labour that the European union left hasn't been able to. Could this be the 'sealed train'<sup>7</sup> of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

### **The customary in/conclusions**

'Empire' for me is not simply that hegemon made famous and fashionable by Hardt and Negri (2000). It is also everyone's local or particular hegemon, of which there are many (patriarchy for one). Which is why I originally wanted the title of a book I co-edited to be 'Challenging *All* Empires'.<sup>8</sup> My local and particular hegemon is the International Trade Union Confederation and all those who sail on this particular ship, or otherwise tug or service it. The ITUC now has (been granted) a quasi-monopoly position in the trade union movement internationally.<sup>9</sup> Neither the ITUC nor its European associate, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) had much more than a shadow presence in Malmo. Rather were they represented by the Decent Work campaign (judgement on which must await analysis of October 7). Neither before nor after the ESF did either of these bodies have anything on their websites about the ESF, attended by many of their affiliates and at least one of their leaders (the earlier-mentioned Wanja Lundby-Wedin)! The ITUC was busy with 'Global Governance' <http://www.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?rubrique4>, and the ETUC with 'The Financial Crisis' – in both cases in terms consistent with the BBC and the liberal media worldwide! Thus the ETUC criticises not capitalism, but 'financial capitalism':

Meeting in London for the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) summer school on 26 and 27 September, Europe's trade union leaders adopted a joint declaration on the crisis of financial capitalism. With their 'London Declaration', European trade

union leaders analyse the financial crisis and call for justice and tough action. Practical proposals were also made to keep this situation from recurring: effective measures must be taken to ensure that the economy continues to benefit from capital for investments, as well as to put an end to outrageous financial speculation. The injection of public money into the economy must be matched with public control, while the regulation of financial markets at international and European levels must be increased. ETUC has transmitted its declaration to the President of the European Central Bank (ECB), the President and Vice-President of the European Commission, the European Commissioner for economic and monetary affairs and the EU Member States' finance ministers. (For the full text see <http://www.etuc.org/a/5367>).

So: industrial capitalism is virtuous, and financial speculation would also be so if it stopped being 'outrageous'. The hegemon of international labour are here playing the role C. Wright Mills (1948) once identified for the post-WW2 US unions, as 'managers of discontent'. They play the role of 'loyal opposition' within capitalism, favouring some moral 'real economy' against the immoral one of the financiers.

I consider it a real limitation that I heard no one in Malmo saying this. I *did* hear one voice criticising the limitations of 'Decent Work', but I am not sure anyone else did. Both the representatives of the institutionalised labour movement (national or international) and the 'alternative', 'left' labour activists were therefore treating the labour hegemon as part of the solution, without also recognising them as at least part of the problem.

This is not a matter of setting up any kind of binary opposition between the all-too-real national-industrial trade union organisations and a still-hypothetical global labour movement challenge to such. The traditional inter/national unions, after all, have several toes dipped into the ESF/WSF, even whilst they still seem have the other foot cemented to the inter/national institutions and ideologies of capitalism. But the non-institutionalised, 'alternative', 'autonomous' labour movement networks or NGOs are also marked by contradictions in their relational forms and ideological expressions.

In such a situation, it seems to me, it is necessary to set up a separate *pole* to that represented by the ITUC-ILO, Brussels-Geneva axis. This should be understood as a pole of *attraction* rather than one of opposition. But it would need to be distinct, whilst clearly also involved in dialogue with the current hegemon of labour (party political and ideological/theoretical as well as trade union). I would also like to think that my little charter initiative exemplifies, or at least contributes toward, the creation of such a pole.

If this charter is considered a 'pole of inaccessibility'<sup>10</sup> for a new global labour solidarity movement, then there is *within it* a minimum step in this direction (it represents neither the Ten Commandments nor the 21 Conditions):<sup>11</sup>

A website/portal coordinating information and ideas oriented toward the emancipation of labour, covering research, education, audio-visually, and other resources; to have such a title as 'The Global Labour Charter', 'The Global Emancipation of Labour', 'Moving Labour Globally'; to be open to sponsorship but autonomous of all organisations and ideologies; open on equal footing to all; to have a preferential option for globally marginalised workers and regions; to have a transformatory purpose and be open in

governance and operation. (Compare here: Choike, Global Labour Strategies, New Unionism, Union Ideas Network, E-Library for Social Transformation, Union Renewal, Rebelión, etc).

The references/resources here indicated can be found at the end of the Full Monty version of the charter appended below. I discussed this matter with one of the ‘alternative’ labour networkers in Malmo and we agreed to explore the matter energetically. It should be hardly necessary to argue further for such a space here. But I do recall my first sight/site of the web, Barranco, Lima, Peru, 1995. My first reaction was, of course, ‘Eureka!’ My first thought was, ‘any internationalist project with no website within the next five years, does not exist!’

Today, of course, it is hard to imagine *any* inter/national union or global labour solidarity project which is *not* online. But today, I think we also have to set the standards higher and make the principles more radically democratic. The point requires stressing because, two weeks after the Malmo ESF, I can find no reference to this surely significant event on any of the labour websites referred to above. Maybe they are yet to appear. Maybe *this* report will. But a site or portal with the characteristics I propose would provide an emancipatory labour project with the initial innovatory characteristics that the WSF has offered the ‘movement of movements’ more widely. Moreover it would be a space accessible to people, networks and organisations lacking or denied the resources to participate in a place-based forum such as we have just had in Malmo.

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<sup>1</sup> For a Trotskyist evaluation see Vivas and Antentas (2008).

<sup>2</sup> I will use ‘independent’ to mean labour activity initiated outside the organised unions, and then, within this category, ‘alternative’ for independent labour activities identified with the WSF, and ‘autonomous’ for those coming from the anarchist/left-libertarian/workerist tradition.

<sup>3</sup> For someone who might share this feeling, and who anyway gives a vivid impression of Malmo, see <http://grahamsgrumbles.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Though not, perhaps, that of the newest and most radical socialist thinking about labour. Porcaro (2008), referring back to the notion of working-class self-formation proposed by British labour historian Edward Thompson says:

(especially today) the main venue for the formation of a potential class consciousness is not production, but life itself, in all its many forms. Does this imply a weakening of the socialist discourse? Allow me to observe that a collective movement of workers (and others) oriented toward social transformation can be built only if and when “consciousness” takes shape as the effect of “whole life”, because strong ideas capable of truly affecting politics (“public” ideas accessible to everybody, regardless of their class and family, ideas organized as causes...can be born only as the result of the whole ensemble of life experience. [...] Ask [workers] which commodities they see as most significant, how and where (i.e., in which socialisation groups) they consume these commodities, how and where they discuss what they consume, how much of such discussion enters the workplace, and with what effects. This suggestion would also apply to our politics: Oversee the venues of consumption (as the earliest workers’ movement did, out of necessity and intelligence), from the signature of a home-mortgage agreement to weekly grocery shopping, because these too are venues of conflict and of identity construction, and are just as important as the “factory”.

Porcaro might, indeed, find my charter too workerist! If so, his proposals for its broadening would be also welcome.

<sup>5</sup> This may have to do with the very word ‘Left’, a spatial positioning which only exists on a spectrum that stretches from ‘Right’, via the ‘Centre’, to the ‘Ultra-Left’. Insofar as ‘left’ originates with the seating of the more popular or militant element in the Constituent Assembly of the French Revolution, it does seem to me that we need today to replace it with another word, ‘emancipatory’, and therefore the project of ‘global social emancipation’. That this term needs to be spelled out anew is one of its attractions. If one stays with ‘Left’ one is likely to find oneself in the political and epistemological morass revealed here: <http://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/l/e.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Actually, the third co-editor of this volume is a South African. And several contributors come from or deal with the South. And I also have a contribution in it. Indeed, it occurs to me, the collection itself is some kind of World Labour Forum! Such overlaps or interpenetrations are common to WSF events.

<sup>7</sup> During the First World War, the first Russian Revolution broke out. Lenin accepted the German offer of a journey back from neutral Switzerland in a sealed train. Neither the first nor the last case of revolutionaries taking a free ride on the dominant media, rather than being taken for one.

<sup>8</sup> The second edition of this 2004 book (Sen and Waterman 2008) was launched at a lively and well attended event in Malmo.

<sup>9</sup> We can more or less forget the (ex?) Communist World Federation of Trade Unions <http://www.wftucentral.org/?language=en>, which I worked for, 1966-9, and which continues a ritualistic

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and self-referential existence in Athens. Self-marginalisation, even from the WSF, regrettably, seems to also be the option of the Australian-funded Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights [www.sigtur.com/](http://www.sigtur.com/), the leftism(s) of which are surely from the last century.

<sup>10</sup> Thank you, Wikipedia, for your polar explorations, thus informing us that a ‘pole of inaccessability marks a location that is the most challenging to reach owing to its remoteness from geographical features which could provide access. The term describes a geographic construct, not an actual physical phenomenon, and is of interest mostly to explorers’. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pole\\_of\\_inaccessability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pole_of_inaccessability).

<sup>11</sup> One of those ‘ironies of history’ popular amongst Marxists is that whilst one can today assume the left knows of the Ten Commandments, one probably has to remind it that the 21 Conditions were requirements for membership of Lenin’s Communist or Third International (aka the Comintern, founded 1919). <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comintern>.

## NEEDED: A GLOBAL LABOUR CHARTER MOVEMENT

<http://www.netzwerkit.de/projekte/waterman/gc>  
erstellt von [Webmaster](#) — zuletzt verändert: 09.09.2008 08:19

For the European Social Forum, Malmo, September 2008

### A Work in Progress

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*[T]he material basis for international working-class solidarity is greater than at any point since the development of capitalism. Nevertheless, the existence of a material basis does not ensure success. Movement from the general recognition that international solidarity is a good to its realisation will require changes in ideological orientations as well as practical programmatic steps.[...]To bring social justice unionism into existence, we must change not only the leadership of existing organised labour but also the relationship between the existing trade union movement and other progressive social forces.*

(Bill Fletcher Jr and Fernando Gapsin 2008)

*Like any movement under attack, labour generally resists as disloyal critical thinking that challenges established tenets and practices. But today that won't do. Now more than ever we need a free and open debate about the future of labour, a debate that respects a full range of opinions and perspectives. Launching such a debate would be a good first step in labour's revival.*

(Global Labour Strategies 2008)

*The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would then be faced with the greatest paradox imaginable...After a long, torturous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of utopia, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.*

(Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1929-31)<sup>2</sup>

## Preamble

The idea of a Global Labour Charter Movement comes out of both desperation and hope. The desperation is due to seeing the labour movement, in North, South, East or West, *still* on the defensive due to (despite?) the severe, multiple and continuing attacks delivered by contemporary capitalism. Not only has the union movement largely forgotten its early emancipatory inspiration and utopian hopes. Even the old adage that 'the best means of defence is attack' seems unfamiliar to labour's international leadership.

The desperation is due – more specifically - to the international unions' continued attempt to *get back* to a mythologised utopia of social harmony (the reality of which is surely responsible for labour's current predicament). This *backward-looking* utopianism is represented in the current 'Decent Work' campaign <http://www.decentwork.org/>. DW promotes the archaic West-European paradise of 'social partnership' between Labour, Capital and State. It has simply hoisted this to the global level. DW is no sense a *union* or *labour movement* project: it has been adopted, lock, stock and two smoking barrels, from the Geneva-based International Labour Organisation. And this is an *inter-state* body (castigated by a former insider (Standing 2008) for *its* multiple incapacities in the face of globalisation!). DW, finally, reproduces a traditional imperial relationship, since it is being promoted by the West to the Rest. Its sponsors and funders are West European social-reformist unions and NGOs...plus the *neo-liberal* European Union!

Hope comes from seeing new energy and vision within the global justice and solidarity movement (GJ&SM), for example in the international rural labour movement, Via Campesina. Despite all the imaginable difficulties confronting the self-organisation of rural labour, this body has developed a holistic vision of its social position, of its enemies, of an alternative future. It has demonstrated assertive global strategies and sophisticated relational practices (internal and external) that have made it a leading actor in the GJ&SM and led to widespread public recognition and support (Desmarais 2007, Waterman 2008a). Hope also comes from signs of assertion and innovation closer to the traditional labour movement, and from new thinking within and about such (Fletcher Jr and Gapasin 2008, Gallin 2003, Huws 2008, Ince 2007, Waterman 2007, Research Committee 44 2008, Bieler, Lindberg and Pillay 2008). As well as from efforts to specify a necessary and desirable post-capitalist utopia – and how it might be reached. (Networked Politics 2008, Adamovsky 2005, 2007, Dwyer-Witheyford 2007, Sousa Santos 2006-7, Spannos 2008).

## Propositions

1. The **idea** of a GLCM is to develop a charter, declaration or manifesto on labour, relevant to *all* working people, under the conditions of a radically transformed and highly aggressive capitalism, neo-liberalised, networked and globalised.
2. The proposing of such a charter has, however, been **provoked** by a couple of other international labour declarations (Bamako Appeal 2006, Labour Platform for the Americas 2006). A common limitation of these otherwise very different documents is that they were initially produced and issued for acceptance or endorsement, by union leaderships or intellectual elites, without previous discussion by union members, shopfloor or community activists themselves. The GLC project is, however, also inspired by a women's one, the Women's Global Charter for Humanity (2004), produced after worldwide discussion by one of the newest mobilising social movements. (Verdière 2006, Conway 2007).
3. In so far as the GLC project is addressed to **the emancipation of life from work** (work here meaning labour for capital and state, empire and patriarchy), it implies *articulating* (both joining and expressing) labour struggles with those of other oppressed and exploited social categories, people and peoples – particularly those previously unrecognised workers, women

and peasants/farmers. The existence of the GJ&SM, best known through the World Social Forum (WSF) process, makes such articulation increasingly possible.

4. Its title could be the '**Global Labour Charter Movement**' (or GLCM21). 'Charter' reminds us of one of the earliest radical-democratic labour-popular movements of industrial capitalism, the British Chartists (Thompson 1984) 'Movement' reminds us that the development of such a declaration is a process and requires the self-mobilisation of workers.
5. Such a process needs to reveal its **origins and debts**. These are not only to early labour history. They are also to the new forms of labour self-organisation (by, within and beyond unions), to the shopfloor, urban and rural labour networks (local, national, international), to the pro-labour NGOs (labour service organisations), and to a growing wave of labour education, to (electronic) communication and to research responding to the global crisis of the labour movement (Waterman 2007).
6. The novel principle of such a charter should be its conception as a '**virtuous spiral**' - that it be thought of not as a single, correct, final declaration, which workers, peoples and other people simply *endorse* (though endorsement could be part of the process), as for its processal, dialogical and developing nature. This notion would allow for it to be begun, paused and joined at any point. Such a process would require at least the following elements: information/communication, education, dialogue, (re-) formulation, action, evaluation, information.
7. It is the existence of **cyberspace** (the internet, the web, online audio-visuals) that makes such a Global Labour Charter for the first time conceivable. We have here not simply a new communications technology but the possibility for developing non-hierarchical, dialogical, equal relations worldwide. The process will be computer-based because of the web's built-in characteristics of feedback, its worldwide reach, its low and decreasing cost. An increasing number of workers and activists are in computerised work, are familiar with information and communication technology and have web skills. Given, however, uneven worker computer access, such a process must also be intensely local, imply and empower outreach, using the communication methods appropriate to particular kinds of labour and each specific locale. (See: Networked Politics).
8. **Networking** can and must ensure that any initiators or coordinators do not become permanent leaders or controllers. There is a growing international body of fulltime organisers and volunteer activists, both within and beyond the traditional inter/national unions, experienced in the GJ&SM, who could provide the initial nodes in such a network. Networking also, however, allows for there to be various such labour charters, in dialogue with each other. Such dialogue should be considered a normal and even necessary part of the process and avoid the authority, dependency or passivity associated with traditional manifestos. (See, again, Networked Politics).
9. If this proposal assumes the **crisis** of the traditional trade unions, it should be clear that it simultaneously represents an **opportunity** for them. This is for a reinvention of the *form* of labour self-articulation, as has occurred more than once in the history of capitalism (from guilds to craft unions, from craft to inter/national industrial unions). By abandoning what is an increasingly imaginary power, centrality or privilege, unions could simultaneously reinvent themselves and become a necessary and significant part of a movement for social emancipation worldwide. The form or forms of such a reinvention will emerge precisely out of a continuing dialogue, the dialectic between organisational and networking activities.
10. Starting with the first edition(s) of any GLC, there could develop globally-agreed demands and campaigns, with these having **emancipatory** (arguably subversive, empowering, socially

transformatory) **implications** for those involved. Rather than increasing their dependence on capital, state, patriarchy, empire, any GLC must increase their solidarity with other popular and radically-democratic sectors/movements.

11. Any such campaigns must, however, be seen as not carved in stone but as collective experiments, to be collectively evaluated. They should therefore be dependent on collective self-activity, implying global solidarity, as with the international 19th century campaign (never universally implemented) for the eight-hour day [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour\\_day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eight-hour_day). There is a wide range of **imaginable issues** (of which the following are hypothetical examples, in no necessary order of priority):
  - A Six-Hour Day, A Five-Day Week, A 48-Week Year, thus distributing available work more widely, reducing overwork (see <http://www.swt.org/>).
  - Global Labour Rights, including the right to strike and inter/national solidarity action, but first *consulting* workers - including migrants, precarious workers, unpaid carers ('housewives'), the self-employed, the unemployed - on their priorities; and secondly by prioritising collective struggles and creative activity over leadership lobbying. [http://laborrightsblog.typepad.com/international\\_labor\\_right/2006/11/about\\_this\\_blog.html](http://laborrightsblog.typepad.com/international_labor_right/2006/11/about_this_blog.html).
  - A Global Basic Income Grant, independent of any obligation to work, and asserting the right to life over the obligation to work <http://www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html>.
  - A Centennial Reinvention of the ILO in 2019, raising labour representation from 25 to 50 percent, and simultaneously sharing the raised percentage with non-unionised workers (Standing 2008);
  - A Global Campaign for Useful Work, reaching beyond conditions of, or at work ('Decent Work') to deal with useful production, socially-responsible consumption, environmental sustainability/restoration (Morris 2008, <http://libcom.org/history/1976-the-fight-for-useful-work-at-lucas-aerospace>).
  - All in Common, a campaign for the defence and extension of forms of common ownership and control (thus challenging both the privatisation process and capitalist ownership in general), Waterman 2004, <http://turbulence.org.uk/turbulence-1/commonism/> ;
  - A reinvention of Mayday as a Global Labour and Social Movements Solidarity Day (consider the innovations introduced by precarious workers in Europe and by immigrant labour in the USA) <http://www.euromayday.org/about.php>, <http://www.mayday2007.org/>;
  - Support to the principle of Solidarity Economics and the practice of the Solidarity Economy, i.e. production, distribution, exchange that surpasses the competitive, divisory, hierarchical, growth-fixated, wasteful, polluting, destructive principles of capitalism. (Miller 2006, Mance 2007)
  - A Global Emancipation of Labour Forum, as part of, or complementing, the World Social Forum, an assembly open to all working people, organisations, intellectuals/artists and movements, organised autonomously from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and the Global Unions. If not in a geographical place then in cyberspace. (Reese and Chase-Dunn 2008, Waterman 2001, 2008).
  - A website/portal coordinating information and ideas oriented toward the emancipation of labour, covering research, education, audio-visuals, and other resources; to have such a title as 'The Global Labour Charter', 'The Global Emancipation of Labour', 'Moving Labour Globally'; to be open to sponsorship but autonomous of all organisations and ideologies; open on equal footing to all; to have a preferential option for globally marginalised workers and regions; to have a transformatory purpose and be open in governance and operation. (Compare here: Choike, Global Labour Strategies, New Unionism, Union Ideas Network, E-Library for Social Transformation, Union Renewal, Rebelión, etc).

- [Fill at will]

12. This proposal is clearly marked by its origin, in terms of its author's 'subject position', place of birth/residence, age, language, etc. It is, however, issued under the principle of CopyLeft. It can therefore be adapted, replaced, challenged, rejected and, obviously, ignored. Its only requirement (or hope) is that it be discussed.

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1. Peter Waterman (London 1936), worked for the international Communist movement in the 1950s and '60s. Through the 1970s-90s, he was a left academic-activist on labour and social movements. In the late-1980s he initiated the international debate on 'social movement unionism'. Now retired, he writes on international labour, the WSF and the global justice and solidarity movement. He is published widely, in English and other languages, in print and on the web. This Charter was first floated in 2005. It has been published in labour publications in South Africa and Colombia as well as on websites in Europe and the US. The present version has been updated and provided with an extensive list of references and resources.

2. Too bad about the patriarchal formulation, but readers can re-imagine the idea in non-sexist terms.