

## Part 1: A Privileged Place?

### Introduction: a crucial triangle

Hosted by Belgium's major institute of labour studies, in Ghent, a Flemish city with a unique labour movement history, this one-day event could be expected to make a further contribution to the crucial triangular relationship between the trade unions, the global justice and solidarity movement (GJ&SM) and the academy. Belgium has further stakes in these topics. French-speaking academics here have also concerned themselves with internationalism, historical and contemporary (Gotovitch and Morelli 2003). Belgium is the base for Cedetim (a.k.a Centre Tricontinental) which, in connection with the Forum Mondial des Alternatives has made a specific contribution to research and documentation on the new global solidarity movements (Amin and Houtart 2002). And Brussels is the base of the International Confederation of Trade Unions, the World Confederation of Labour (soon to be merged) and many of the associated Global Unions.

The Ghent programme introduced the event as follows:

When speaking of 'anti-globalism' a number of social organisations and activities are designated, resisting to worldwide processes of so-called 'globalization'. This usually refers to neo-liberal economical reforms, and the often catastrophic social, cultural and ecological effects on the lives of a large part of the world population, most often but not exclusively in the South.

The protest actions against the 1999 Seattle meeting of the World Trade Organisation are generally considered as the starting point of this new social movement, although rooted in other social movements such as the third world movement or the ecological movement.

Though being a recent phenomenon, social sciences have already devoted serious research attention to the movement. Amsab-Institute of Social History will bring together a number of researchers in the International Colloquium Anti-Globalism, who will survey the research on the anti-globalist movement.

The colloquium will touch upon a theme that in the coming years will become ever more important in the evolution of the anti-globalist movement, namely its position towards the 'global governance authorities'. Within the movement a relatively positive attitude exists towards the United Nations Organisation and linked organizations such as UNCTAD, although their structure and the lack of democracy in their decision making is under serious criticism. Sharply negative, on the other hand, is the attitude towards organizations such as WTO, IMF or G8. <http://www.amsab.be/anti-globalism/>.

The one-day event was, with little doubt, intended to build on or add to such previous conferences of European labour research institutes/archives. These include one of Amsab itself and another of the International Conference of Labour and Social History, Linz, Austria. The first of these considered the past, present and future of the 50-year-old International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (de Wilde 2001, Waterman 2001). The second was on 'Labour and New Social Movements in a Globalising World System' (Unfried and van der Linden 2004, Waterman 2005a).

Why I consider these events a crucial triangular relationship is because they have seemed to provide a space within which it was not only possible to reflect, at some academically-legitimised critical distance, on the movements themselves but also one within which there could be some serious dialogue on the relations between the two. Although it is my experience that the *new* movements have little trouble looking critically at themselves and each other (endlessly), the trade unions and political parties do have a problem here - a fortress syndrome possibly deepened by crises of legitimacy and authority. But even within the endless discussion spaces of the World Social Forum (WSF) process, there has so far been little serious discussion on the trade unions/labour movement, or their relationship with the new one. Here the old and the new make love like porcupines - carefully.<sup>i</sup>

### **Documenting and researching**

One half of the day in Ghent was apparently to be devoted to documentation and research on the 'anti-globalism' movement, the other half to its impact on 'global governance'. These areas and names themselves suggest the interests and orientations of the sponsors of all three above-mentioned events, linked as they are by the International Association of Labour History Institutes (IALHI), <http://www.ialhi.org/>. This formidable organisation brings together union, party and associated research bodies, largely of the European social-reformist tradition. Earlier Marxist or Communist influences within IALHI have declined, for reasons that hardly require repetition. Yet, at the same time (and by related tokens!), the crisis of both unionism and social-democracy internationally seems to have been encouraging at least some within IALHI to confront the challenge of the new international 'movement of movements'. The latter could be considered to be today playing an analogous, if infinitely more complex, role to that of the labour movement in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The questions arise not only of 1) whether, how or when the old movement will commit itself to the new but of 2) whether the new movement will not be incorporated into capitalism as the old one was, or whether it might 3) succeed as an emancipatory movement where the old one failed.

The relationship between documentation/research on the labour movement and the GJ&SM was to be considered by speakers associated with both traditions. I am not sure that the research/documentation projects of either have been much aware of each other. Ignorance is likely to be more true for researchers/archivists of the *new* movement than the *old* one, given the new movement tendency to assume that international social protest (and internationalism?) began in Chiapas 1994 or Seattle 1998! And, of course, because the global justice movement *is* new, un-institutionalised, inchoate, experimental and (relatively) underfunded. There are, nonetheless, various projects in and around the World Social Forum (WSF), intended to preserve the 'memory' of at least the WSF itself <http://www.memoria-viva.org/indexen.htm>. And, in so far as the GJ&SM tends to recognise the centrality to its very existence of the Web,

cyberspace already houses - and can house - infinite records and resources that any new research/archive projects can rely on. (For various reflections, projects and resources here consider Barker and Cox 2002(?), Reyes 2005, Sullivan 2004, Waterman 2005b). There is thus little reason why collaboration on this axis should not benefit researchers and archivists on both sides.

### **Social movements and global ‘governance’**

The afternoon session, on social movements and global governance, could be expected to be more problematic. Naming is (an attempt at) taming, and this topic seems to me one here already tamed to play a role within an established social-democratic-cum-liberal-pluralist arena of discourse.

The conventional term ‘Anti-Globalisation Movement’ tends to suffer, as do all negative definitions, from over-dependence on that against which it is posed. Which is why I prefer the one that came out of the World Social Forum process itself in 2002, the GJ&SM. As for ‘Governance’, this is not simply a neutral political science term, intended to focus attention on power relations beyond the institutions: it is one that leans heavily toward ‘management’. It clearly defuses any notion of ‘hegemony’, with implications of domination (military, political, ideological), alienation, exploitation. The neutralising new term therefore threatens to turn social movements, young middle-aged or old, into co-managers of global discontents (compare Wright Mills 1948 on the US unions of his day - and ours). It has, indeed, been argued that the concept is specifically linked to the ideology and institutions of neo-liberalism (De Angelis 2003:24):

[G]overnance, far from representing a paradigm shift away from neoliberal practices, [is a] central element of the neoliberal discourse in a particular phase of it, when neoliberalism and capital in general face particular stringent problems of accumulation, growing social conflict and a crisis of reproduction. Governance sets itself the task to tackle these problems for capital by relaying the disciplinary role of the market through the establishment of a “continuity of powers” based on normalised market values as the truly universal values. Governance thus seeks to embed these values in the many ways the vast arrays of social and environmental problems are addressed. It thus promotes active participation of society in the reproduction of life and of our species on the basis of this market normalisation. Neoliberal governance thus seeks co-optation of the struggles for reproduction and social justice and, ultimately, promotes the perspective of the ‘end of history’.

A focus on the relations of the movements with a ‘global civil society in the making’ would seem to me *hypothetically* more open – less reproductive of failed national social-democratic projects and failing liberal-pluralist thinking – than one on governance (Waterman and Timms 2004). This needs to be said because there is a parallel corporate project, ‘corporate social responsibility’ (CSR) intimately linked with ‘global governance’, and with which both the old and the new international social movements are intertwined (Charkiewicz 2005, Richter 2003). Charkiewicz characterises CSR as

a paradigmatic example of how policy dialogues increasingly operate as virtual spectacles where governance is performed according to carefully scripted rules and norms. NGOs [and unions – PW] are offered voice without influence. Concepts such as poverty reduction or CSR have taken a discursive life of their own and by so doing pretend that poverty or CSR and accountability is addressed. The virtual performance of governance makes the differential effects of the organisation of the global production and consumption on the realities of people's livelihoods invisible, as it assumes that these are addressed. [...]

While...policy discourses such as CSR are conducted in the name of caring for life, and claim to deal with the social and environmental effects of production and consumption, at the same time they obscure that in order to generate value and profits life has to be killed. Inextricably linked with the caring face of global governance which operates through biopolitical security discourses such as the one on CSR is the global economy which operates as war on livelihoods. (Charkiewicz 2005:81)

The second part of the colloquium was, however, to be opened by the Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva, closely associated with the new movements (and such orientations). It was also, however, to be addressed by a representative of the Brussels-based International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which has one foot in the institutions of global governance-cum-corporate social responsibility, and one toe in the World Social Forum process (Waterman and Timms 2004).

Shiva favours a 'living democracy':

We need international solidarity and autonomous organising. Our politics needs to reflect the principle of subsidiarity. Our global presence cannot be a shadow of the power of corporations and Bretton Woods institutions. We need stronger movements at local and national levels, movements that combine resistance and constructive action, protests and building of alternatives, non-cooperation with unjust rule and cooperation within society. The global, for us, must strengthen the local and national, not undermine it. The two tendencies that we demand of the economic system needs to be central to people's politics -- localisation and alternatives. Both are not just economic alternatives they are democratic alternatives. Without them forces for change cannot be mobilised in the new context.  
<http://www.zmag.org/content/GlobalEconomics/ShivaWSF.cfm>.

Elsewhere, in the same piece Shiva advances arguments close to those of the Foucauldian feminist Charkiewicz and of the libertarian Marxists (for whom see *The Commoner* 2003).

Another angle on social movement engagement with the political and economic 'masters of the universe' is that of Patrick Bond, of the Centre for Civil Society in South Africa. Bond has been closely associated with the recent wave of movements and campaigns against neo-liberalism, nationally and internationally (Bond, Brutus and

Setshedi 2005). Targeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of the UN, he argues against civil society participation in and inevitable legitimization of such, and for movement 'decommodification' struggles:

To illustrate, the South African decommodification agenda entails struggles to turn basic needs into genuine human rights including: free anti-retroviral medicines to fight AIDS (hence disempowering Big Pharma); 50 litres of free water per person per day (hence ridding Africa of Suez and other water privatisers); 1 kilowatt hour of free electricity for each individual every day (hence reorienting energy resources from export-oriented mining and smelting, to basic-needs consumption); extensive land reform (hence de-emphasising cash cropping and export-oriented plantations); prohibitions on service disconnections and evictions; free education (hence halting the General Agreement on Trade in Services); and the like. A free 'Basic Income Grant' allowance of \$15/month is even advocated by churches, NGOs and trade unions. All such services should be universal (open to all, no matter income levels), and to the extent feasible, financed through higher prices that penalise luxury consumption. This potentially unifying agenda – far superior to MDGs, in part because the agenda reflects real, durable grassroots struggles across the world - could serve as a basis for widescale social change... (Bond 2005)

There would seem to be a considerable tension, not to say an 'antagonistic contradiction', between such views, particularly if addressed to labour and social-reformists in general, to the ICFTU in particular (Waterman 2003).

The ICFTU continues to be heavily committed to the hoisting of failing national-level 'social partnerships' - those between capital, labour and state - to the global level. This has so far been done without consideration of why such partnerships are universally failing at national level, where workers have had most power (at least over their unions), and why they should succeed at the global one (out of the sight or reach of workers?). 'Social partnership' has always meant the subordinate contribution of labour, as junior partner, to the development of capitalism and the state, as senior partners. This understanding is now being energetically promoted by the United Nations. The ICFTU is as deeply committed to the Global Compact now as it earlier was to another failed and unexamined project, that of achieving a 'Social Clause' (international labour rights) within the World Trade Organisation (which is intended to destroy such). Concerning one part of its involvement in and with global governance, the ICFTU says:

The Global Compact is...an initiative that is based on dialogue, including social dialogue, built around the core labour standards of the ILO as well as other universal standards relating to human rights and the environment. This is an important opportunity for the social partners and other parties to develop relationships that will resolve problems inside companies and industries as well as to develop dialogue on compelling policy issues.

Global social dialogue has taken concrete form in 14 framework agreements signed by major companies with global union federations.

The agreements are important not only for what is on paper but for the social dialogue that produced them and that continues to make them living agreements. They are pioneering ventures that contribute to good industrial relations. <http://www.icftu.org/displaydocument.asp?Index=991215023&Language=EN>

This language suggests the continuing faith of the ICFTU in the UN system, in capitalist democracy and the...umm...liberal-democratic corporation? Such a faith could hardly be more distant from Shiva's notion of living democracy. Or the vision, at least at one moment, of the Alliance for a Corporate-Free UN (see Resources).<sup>ii</sup> Or the following understanding of the grossly *anti-democratic* corporation. Here it was argued, on the basis of research on Nestlé, that the Global Compact should be disbanded:

[T]he Global Compact is based on and propagates the credo that there is no fundamental contradiction between profit-maximisation and the will and ability to 'voluntarily' respect human rights and foster human development and democratic decision making [...] Replication of the Global Compact model all over the world risks creating new networks of elite governance, entrenching corporate-led neoliberal globalisation and eroding democratic structures. (Richter 2003:44)

Given, however, the range of other speakers invited to the Colloquium, it was difficult to predict before the event in which direction discussion might go.

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<sup>i</sup> Whilst I am using the conventional shorthand distinction between the 'old' and the 'new', I am aware of the numerous ways in which these two categories overlap and in which, for example, the 'new' can reproduce today the characteristics associated with the 'old' 50 or 100 years ago! Whilst, further, I am identified with the GJ&SM, I hope this is not to the point of being partisan. As passing comments and other listed writings of my own might suggest, I have a critical posture toward such. It is simply here a matter of arguing the significance of a globalised networked capitalism, the GJ&SM, and the emancipatory possibilities of networking, with advocates of the traditional labour institutions, the union and the party.

<sup>ii</sup> Paradoxical is that the position of the international labour *movement* is so much more incorporated into the inter-state institutions and discourses than a radical-nationalist *state*. Thus, at the 60th anniversary of the UN, New York, September 2005, Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ICFTU, was clearly talking from inside an existing system, proposing the reform, improvement, implementation of something taken as already existing, at least potentially. And then appealing to the crisis-ridden state system to clean out its own Augean stable:

Joining together to achieve [social] justice is our [UN plus nation-states and unions? PW] best contribution to making sure that we and our children can live in a world free from poverty, desperation and conflict in future years. Let us all rise to the challenge. The UN has known its greatest successes, and won its lasting authority from those occasions when its member states have risen above narrow self interest to the uplands from which the vision of a better common future becomes clear. This Summit must be one such occasion. It is in your hands to make it so. <http://www.un.org/webcast/summit2005/statements.html>

(For those as unfamiliar as I am with Greek mythology, the invaluable Wikipedia reminds us that 'The Augean Stable was one of the Twelve Labours of Hercules. Hercules's task was to clean out a stable that had been soiled by years of neglect. Hercules succeeded by using a boulder to gouge out a trench, diverting a river through the stable'. One could continue the parable...).

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On the other hand, the President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez was going beyond the parameters of the inter-state system, as accepted not only by the unions but most representatives of global civil society. He was raising fundamental questions about the UN, proposing to remove its headquarters from the United States, as a rogue state, and the re-invention of the UN to meet popular needs:

The original purpose of this meeting has been completely distorted. The imposed center of debate has been a so-called reform process that overshadows the most urgent issues, what the peoples of the world claim with urgency: the adoption of measures that deal with the real problems that block and sabotage the efforts made by our countries for real development and life. <http://www.vheadline.com/readnews.asp?id=46000>

The difference would seem to be between thinking within and thinking without (beyond) the box. Global civil society is going to pay little attention to the ICFTU's timid proposals. I would expect those of Chavez to provoke more debate.