

INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND HEGEMONY UNDER A GLOBALISED NETWORKED CAPITALISM:

The Role of Research, Documentation, Communication

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Do international labour studies conferences constitute privileged places for moving forward the dialogue between the 'old' labour and union institutions, on the one hand, and the 'new' global justice movement, on the other? Drawing from earlier experience, this paper begins with the assumption that this is the case. Part 1 was written as an exercise of preparation for the International Colloquium on Anti-Globalism, Amsab/Institute of Social History, Ghent, Belgium, September 9, 2005. It has been only marginally edited. Part 2 was written after the event and suggests that more than such places are necessary. The old, established and traditional social movement (developed under a national industrial capitalism, institutionalised, Westocentric, incorporated into old understandings about and with capital, state and 'development') needs to take cognisance of its relative power and privilege. And it then needs to make space for something that might be relatively marginal and weak but that nonetheless comes out of a globalised and networked capitalism. The 'movement of movements' proposes new understandings of the world; it identifies new arenas of dispute with the hegemonic forces; and it suggests new forms of dialogue between social movements.

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.¹

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 19th-20th 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 legitimisation 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).² 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.

Part 2: Appropriate Spaces Need to be Created

The colloquium did not fulfil the expectations expressed above but did provide various stimuli or provocations to further reflection on the posited relationships. I will detail on both.

First the bad news.

Ghent, I have said, has a remarkable labour history, including the largest collection of historical labour movement buildings of *any* city I have ever visited. The most visible of these is *Ons Huis* (Our House), built around the turn of the 19th-20th century, a home for a range of labour organisations, and bearing the historical device: ‘Workers of All Lands, Unite!’. The ground floor of this, unfortunately, has been vandalised by some bureaucrat-architect and turned into a soulless 1950s welfare office. This normalisation of a once-emancipatory movement into a state agency, or something compatible with such, presaged things to come.

There was no real morning session on documentation and research, just one or two short presentations, both Belgian. (A whole day would have been necessary to have given his topic more than cursory treatment). Vandana Shiva, reportedly sick, was replaced by a Belgian philosopher - parachuted in and airlifted out. At one stroke there fell away a Feminist, Ecological and Third World contribution.³ The Belgian presentation embroidered, with decorative stitches, on *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (2000). The afternoon panel consisted, for the rest, of five or six speakers, all but one Belgian, and two of whom were unionists of the European social-reformist tradition (one national, one international).⁴ Any hypothetical discussion time was monopolised by the chair, leading to vigorous protest by Oupa Lehulere, from South Africa, that this was contrary to the spirit of dialogue and participation in the newest social movements. It only then occurred to me that there had been, at this supposedly international event, only two platform speakers from outside Belgium, one from the Netherlands,⁵ one from Canada. And that of all the platform speakers, only one, the 80-year-young François Houtart, could be possibly taken as speaking for a significant movement tendency sceptical of the discourse of ‘global governance’ and suspicious of strategies of dialogue with such (but who then appeared on the platform twice!). In almost all aspects, except for size and hospitality, the colloquium was a step back

from Linz. It was another iteration of 20th century Eurocentric incrementalist strategies on the international stage. Indeed, the most dramatic dissenting platform voice was another archaic one, suggesting that capitalism could not be overthrown without armed force – something unlikely to appeal to labour and social movements, whether in Belgium or Peru.⁶

So what could the good news possibly be?

There were several scholarly presentations, which might result in original and provocative books or papers.⁷ Francine Mestrum (2002, 2005), a forceful critic of neo-liberal globalisation and a leader of Attac in Flanders, reinforced the orientation of the event as a whole, arguing, 1) that most members of the anti-globalisation movement were really nationally embedded and that nation states were the only real power on the international scene, 2) that, as far as movement relations with the world of politics are concerned, it had to recognise that elected representatives are the only legitimate representatives of the people. Thomas Ponniah,⁸ from Canada, argued that two main orientations or foci were identifiable within the World Social Forum process, a 'Participatory Democratic Statism' and 'Horizontalism'. These were not, Thomas later informed me, intended to reproduce the old reform/revolution dichotomy, since he sees each as having its own radical and reformist tendencies, and because the two anyway interpenetrate. The first was exemplified by him with the participatory-budgeting process of Porto Alegre, Brazil, the second by the now-worldwide Indymedia websites (see, e.g., <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/regions/world/topics/socialstruggles/>) and by the youth camp at the WSFs (for which see Nunes 2005). François Houtart proposed re-theorising the 'old/new' conceptualisation of social movements in terms of Marx's distinction between the formal and real subsumption of labour (for which see 'subsumption' at <http://search.marxists.org/cgi-bin/htsearch>).

Unfortunately, brief plenary presentation, to a hall of 150, was hardly conducive to the discussion such papers might have deserved. But let me anyway respond, if also summarily:

Francine Mestrum. Her two statements seem to me traditional assumptions that fail to take account of the extent to which globalisation, the GJ&SM, and emancipatory theorists, have profoundly challenged them. Indeed, the world's population seems somewhat more sceptical about politicians – and less identified with the nation-state - than Mestrum might be taken as suggesting. While I was writing this piece the BBC report on a Gallup poll which revealed that:

Sixty-five percent of citizens across the world do not think their country is governed by the will of the people...The Gallup International Voice of the People 2005 poll questioned more than 50,000 people in 68 states for the BBC World Service survey about power...The survey also found that only 13% of people trusted politicians and only 16% thought they should be given more power... Nationality was used by a third of those surveyed to 'define' themselves. About a fifth chose religion.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/4247158.stm

Thomas Ponniah. I cannot identify the principle of difference – the logic of distinction - between the two tendencies identified. And the question remains in my mind of whether it does not anyway conceal *other* significant lines of tension within the new movement, or reduce or subordinate them to this primary one.

François Houtart's appeal to Marx is based on a recognition that most of the world's working people are exploited not through the wage relationship but through multiple other forms. This argument, it seems to me, runs the risk of merely turning upside-down the political-economic-determinist assumption that real subsumption gives the waged working class a privileged role in global social emancipation. I have been long interested in the implications, for an emancipatory and internationalist social movement, of recognising the full true dimensions of 'labour for capital' in the contemporary world. But I am equally sceptical of any assumption of revolutionary or internationalist privilege attached to this much more extended class.

More stimulation to thought was, fortunately, provided - as at all academic conferences - in the interstices. For me this was particularly in discussions with the South Africans, Oupa Lehulere and Mondli Hlatshwayo, and in publications from their Khanya College. And then on the bookstalls, with a publication of the French BDIC (Bibliothèque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine), and two Belgian magazines. Again this requires detailing:

Khanya College, Johannesburg, is an adult-education, research and publication operation, with one foot in the traditional labour and community movements, one in the new social movements of South Africa. Apart from the resources it might provide to such traditions in the country itself, it has a Southern African solidarity programme. And two of Lehulere's conference teeshirts happened to concern campaigns against (popular) South African xenophobia in the face of foreign immigrants! Khanya is hosting, October 2005, a conference marking the 20th anniversary of the foundation of the national union confederation, Cosatu. And, indeed, Oupa Lehulere has himself intervened, forcefully and at length, in local debate about the relationship of the South African unions to the ruling party, to working people and to the new movements (Lehulere 2005). A special issue of the quarterly Khanya magazine, guest-edited by Hlatshwayo and distributed at the colloquium, was devoted to the unions (Khanya 2005). One article directly addresses the union response to immigrant labour, appealing to principles of solidarity against those of competition. National and international union activist, Maria van Driel 'argues that social dialogue, which is the policy of the main South African trade unions, cannot advance the interests of the working class under conditions of neo-liberalism' (van Driel 2005:27). One would have liked to have heard this kind of sound, discussion on this kind of debate, within the colloquium itself (see the relevant contents list at **Appendix 1**).

Matériaux. The high point of the event for me was, however, another publication, in French, a special issue of *Matériaux* on 'Internet and Social Movements: New Militant Practices, New Sources for History' (*Matériaux Pour L'Histoire de Notre Temps*. 2005). Over 100 pages long, in double-column format, this could have served as a pre-colloquium reader, lacking only explicit address to 'anti-globalism' and 'global governance'. This was not a great loss when one bears in mind that the compilation represents both an empirical account and conceptual discussion of the a global and movement-informed civil society in construction. And

that it recognises both implicitly and explicitly that cyberspace represents a privileged place for struggle under the informatised networked capitalism of the 21st century. The collection is not, however, a partisan volume since it provides space to relevant state and traditional academic practices as well. The compilation deals first with new forms of informatised work, with practices of French trade unions and parties and with national/international social movements. It deals secondly with the collection and protection of relevant electronic archives, with contributions from France, the US, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Switzerland and Flanders itself.

It is impossible to here summarise the collection, which one hopes will appear both in print and in English. Fortunately, six or seven of the contributions in English are on the website of the Feltrinelli Foundation (see Websites and Lists below. The contents of the relevant issue are in **Appendix 2**. And I have indicated one or two relevant URLs from this collection under Websites and Lists below). A taste of the nature of the collection is given by the following quotations from the Introduction:

We have...carried out two series of interviews. The first were done with representatives of what one might call the traditional social movement, that means essentially with union organisations... We were thus able to note that the commonly-held feeling that these organisations only use the Internet 'vertically' – without the employment of NICT [new information and communication technologies] modifying pre-existent structures - has to be qualified. This perception may be true at the level of the confederations... but appears more problematic when one asks about the manner in which certain unions have made use of the Internet tool, particularly within the framework of social conflicts: ... From here to the notion that NICT modifies the very forms of union democracy, requires a step which we cannot claim to take: it is still difficult, at our level of research, to affirm the order of causes and effects. Does the apparition of new forms of participatory democracy make possible a certain use of Net tools (including within the old structures), or is it, on the contrary, that the development of the Internet has facilitated the apparition of the new kinds of behaviour?

A second series of interviews were carried out with what for convenience we have decided to call 'new social movements'... If one accepts certain analyses, these movements bring together militants coming from fractions marginalised from the political chessboard, for whom the [national French] strike of 1995 could have played the role of a (re)founding moment, to which the alter-globalisation theses might have given new legitimacy, and mobilised themselves thus in search of solutions alternative to the taking of power. The NICTs are clearly particularly appropriate for the development of militant structures of a horizontal type, functioning in networks, and the members of which seek a participatory and consensual democracy. The use of Net tools has been very useful also, evidently, for the development of transnational militancy (of which, in addition to the nation-state, the scales of action are on the local or global level). Without going too far, one could thus say that if alter-globalisation

was not born from the Internet, it certainly could not have existed without it. (Matériels 2005:7)

The Belgian magazines. One of these was the Flemish *MO Mondiaal Magazine*, the other a French one, *Politique: Revue des Débats*. The first is edited by the chair of the afternoon session in Ghent, Gie Goris. The September 2005 issue not only highlighted our own colloquium but appears to identify with such incrementalist aims as the Millennium Development Goals. The second had, in its September 2003 issue, a special section, entitled 'A journey with the alterglobalisers: a new militant generation?'. Whilst the first magazine was more popular, the second more political, the existence of such publications attests to Belgian interest in globalisation and the GJ&SM. Both magazines were clearly well-established, professional and attractive.

I may seem to have wandered a certain way from not only the colloquium itself but from my own remarks and hopes in Part 1. There I concentrated on critique of what we might now call – at a deep-point in UN reformist illusion – 'global-governance-babble'. But I also expressed the hope, based on labour history conferences since the millennium, that these provided spaces within which serious dialogue could occur on the relation between the historical labour movement and the contemporary social justice one. Ghent demonstrates that this is not necessarily the case, and that it is possible for academics and activists attached to the historical movement, to continue to repeat, with blind self-confidence, 20thC Eurocentric and incrementalist discourses and practices.

The publications I found at Ghent nonetheless suggest a possible way forward. This lies precisely in the area of communication, broadly understood so as to include information at the low or narrow end and culture at the high or broad. I note that neither in the colloquium specification, nor my comments, nor at the colloquium itself was much attention given to what Manuel Castells (1996-8) has called the network society. Marcel v.d.Linden presented the transformation toward information capitalism less as a 'tectonic shift' more as a set of new technologies: 'the emergence in the 1990s of the widespread use of powerful new communication media: the Internet and cellphones'. In the colloquium more generally, NICT was seen as something used, or to be used, by the labour and global justice movements, rather than as the Mother of all Tectonic Shifts. Castells, on the other hand, likens this transformation not to the technological revolutions of the last century or so (radio, photography, telephone, the internal combustion engine, cinema), nor to the steam engine on which industrial capitalism was based. He calls it an epochal transformation and compares it to the invention of the alphabet, around 2,700 years ago (discussed Waterman 1998)!

Although the collection from *Matériaux* did not enter this kind of discussion, and although the Khanya material was in old-fashioned print, I think that they collectively indicate significant ways forward for global social emancipation. *Matériaux* suggests this not only in its consideration of the manner in which work is being informatised in call centres (though it does not consider the full extent nor the international/ist implications of this), but in its attention to the transformation of social movements and relations within and between such by networking, and the possibilities this provides for both participation and horizontalism (thus further challenging the Ponniah distinction/opposition?). The Khanya material, as well as the

forceful colloquium intervention of Lehulere, illustrates the other end of the spectrum, that of a new emancipatory labour and social movement culture. Coming out of 30 years of labour struggle in South Africa, yet cognisant of the new movements of the poor in South Africa, this issue represents a social movement challenge to institutionalised trade unionism. Moreover, this challenge has, as mentioned, a significant presence on the Web in South Africa.⁹

The point here is this: that the forms and shapes of alienation have changed and broadened; that the working class - assumed to be homogeneous and the privileged bearer of emancipation and internationalism - is being re-divided; that the trade-union form, as we have known it for 50-100 years, might have been appropriate for a national-industrial capitalism but is inappropriate for a globalised networked one; that the international union organisations, might unite or restructure, and claim 150+ million members, but these members are hardly aware of their membership of such; that the unionised only represent some 13 percent of the world's labour force; that the historical labour movement (unions, parties, cooperatives) has little if any presence or impact on the culture, nationally or globally. One could continue. But the main point is that we are living the most profound crisis in the history of the labour movement – only emphasised by the high profile enjoyed by the tiny and diverse global justice movement, with its potential appeal to working people, unionised or not.

A re-invention of the inter/national labour organisations as a global labour movement, a re-assertion of labour in the global arenas of information-communication-culture, would seem to be the only alternative to reiteration of old formulas (sometimes on new but unexamined political levels or using, but not living in, the new networked capitalism). So I am wondering whether we should not be identifying as a privileged site for dialogue the triangle mentioned above or a *quadrangle* in which the emancipatory role of communication, in all its senses, is given full recognition.

I have earlier used this parable:

The trade unions turn out to play football against the capitalists, only to find that the football field has been turned into an ice stadium. The capitalists are kitted out for ice hockey and are whizzing around the footballers, practicing their devastating shots. Appealing to the state-umpire, the unions complain against this un-negotiated change in the nature of the game. 'But what can I do?', the umpire complains, 'If I don't let them play here they will simply shift somewhere else'.

It is a cruel parable but actually inadequate to the case. The capitalists are not playing hockey in an ice stadium. They are playing computer games in cyberspace.

Conclusion

In case this might seem in doubt, I have no intention of writing off workers, unions, the nation-state, enterprise-level struggles, the inter-state organisations, nor international labour research conferences. On the contrary, I consider that all of these have a role to play in the development of a new global solidarity movement appropriate to the conditions of a globalised, networked capitalism. It is simply that each of these bodies or instances has to recognise their loss of (assumed) centrality or privilege, to become modest contributors to something much larger – and rather more politically and theoretically complex and sophisticated – than they are. To make the point unambiguous: participants in the World Social Forums have so far consisted to some 80 percent of the university-educated! Welcome as they must be to any new emancipatory movement, they need to be accompanied by a dramatic increase in the number of working people, unionised or not.

Furthermore, the traditional international labour studies conference is not necessarily in the same parlous state as its object of study. Thus, the Labour Movements Research Committee of the International Sociological Association, announces in its latest bulletin (RC 44 Newsletter 2005) a whole series of coming conferences, including one of its own. This latter will consist of the following sessions, which seems to me thoroughly of our time:

- 1: Theorising Labour
- 2: Labour History in the era of Neo-liberal Globalisation
- 3: Global Corporate Restructuring and Global Governance
- 4: Changing Worlds of Work
- 5: Gender and Labour
- 6: Labour and Social Movements
- 7: Models of Union Organisation
- 8: Transnational Organising
- 9: Trade Unions and Politics Session
- 10: The Changing Geography of Power Session
- 11: Trade Unions and NGOs: Surviving the Future

One hopes, again, that this event, occurring as it will in Durban, the town which gave birth to the new trade union movement in South Africa in 1973, will have learned from other recent international labour conferences (and might add a 12th session on computerisation, communications and culture?).

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Conserving the Memory of Contemporary Social Movements in Flanders: The Work of the Institute of Social History, Ghent

Source: www.bdic.fr

¹ 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.

² 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...).

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.

³ Dieter Lesage has not only written a major reflection on *Empire*, in Dutch/Flemish (Lesage 2005?), but also spoken, more relevantly than at the colloquium, about the global justice movement (in Dutch <http://www.indymedia.be/news/2004/10/88654.php>). I am inclined to feel, however, that Lesage was discussing the wrong book. The more recent work by Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* (2004), would surely have provided a more relevant point of reference. It addresses itself to new forms of labour, to workers, peasants, unions, to a new understanding of oppression/exploitation, to new emancipatory forms of articulation and sites of struggle, to war and to democracy – and even to the reform of interstate institutions! There is, of course, no reason why the colloquium should have felt obliged to start with this book, but it would at least have begun the event in the right century.

⁴ I was assured that every effort had been made by Amsab to obtain Southern speakers. But this hardly explains the presence of the Brussels-based union twins, whose institutional declarations added nothing to my earlier characterisation of the ICFTU.

⁵ This was Marcel van der Linden (2005), making an original contribution of wide empirical and literary reference.

⁶ This voice was somewhat surprising given that it was that of Anne Morelli, whose co-edited compilation (Gotovitch and Morelli 2003), makes a serious contribution to the history of internationalism.

⁷ My reporting here should be considered only approximate, in so far as I am depending on notes, authors' drafts, and brief comments by a couple of the authors referred, on which it is to be hoped they will expand.

⁸ Ponniah, of Indian descent, co-edited the first-ever collection on the World Social Forum (Fisher and Ponniah 2002). He is completing a related PhD. Ponniah, like Mestrum and myself, is a member of the Helsinki-based Network Institute for Global Democratisation <http://www.nigd.org/>. This raises the possibility of an exchange on the Colloquium issues within that forum itself.

⁹ Thus, Debate List is a remarkably busy, lively and virtually unedited left list, covering matters national, regional, continental, international (other countries) and global (globalisation and the global justice movement). Whilst leaning in the direction of the new movements in South Africa and internationally, it is also pluralistic, permitting contributions from anarchists, autonomists, Cosatu officers, Communists, African National Congress supporters, social democrats, liberal democrats (I think) and half a dozen other possibly unidentifiable tendencies. It should not, moreover, be assumed that South Africa is the only country in the South in which traditional union practices are being forcefully questioned. In Argentina, and elsewhere in Latin America, related challenges are being made. Consider <http://www.iisg.nl/labouragain/publications.html> and other pages on the Labour Again site at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. Nor is the necessary new orientation confined to the South. A modest Canadian socialist initiative seems to me rather more open to the global justice movement than the Belgians appeared to be. This is the Socialist Project <http://www.socialistproject.ca/>, which has published a provocative piece on a new labour internationalism (Gindin 2004), and has proposed the necessity for networking if the labour movement is to be revived http://www.web.net/~sclstpj2003/relay/r01_Rethinking_the_Labour_Movement.html.