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Trade Union Internationalism in the Age of Seattle¹

It is widely recognised that the international labour movement is in profound crisis. Most trade unions seem to be stuck in a nostalgic, ideological past without realising the need for more networking and dialogue in the global and neo-liberal world order of today. Peter Waterman analyses the failings of the past and proposes changes for the future.

Introduction

It is widely recognised within and around the labour movement that labour (as wage work, as class identity, in the trade union form, as a partner in industrial relations, as a radical-democratic social movement, as a part of civil society) is in profound crisis. Even more is this the case for labour as an international movement at a time in which the old *international* capitalist order is being challenged by the new *global* capitalist disorder. Recovery requires a critique of traditional labour internationalism, re-conceptualisation, new kinds of analysis, and a new dialogue and dialectic between interested parties.

Presented here in turn are the following: 1) a critique of the union internationalism of the national/industrial/colonial (NIC) era; 2) a reconceptualisation of unionism and labour internationalism appropriate to a globalised/networked/informatised (GNI) capitalist era, 3) the millennial dialogue on labour and globalisation; 4) one of the new academic approaches to international labour/labour internationalism; 5) the role of communication, culture and the new information and communication technology (ICT). The conclusion stresses the centrality of networking, communication and dialogue to the creation of a new labour internationalism.

1. Union internationals and the national/industrial/colonial era²

There have been and still are other types of 'international' union organisation, such as: an always-marginal social-christian one, now known as the World Confederation of Labour (WCL); autonomous regional ones, such as the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity; and even the US American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organisations (AFL-CIO) that operated for decades as if it were a parallel and competing international, complete with its own regional institutions and operations! But I will have to limit myself to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and two other types that relate, or have related to it, in significant ways. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) represents the Communist tradition of union internationalism, and was in *ideological/political* competition with the ICFTU during the Cold War era. The International Transportworkers Federation (ITF), as one of several major *industry-based* International Trade Secretariats (ITSs), represents a type of international that

preceded the ICFTU: this type was, and is, in some competition with the *nation–state–based* ICFTU. The political/ideological victory of the ICFTU in the Cold War, and its confusion or crisis in the face of neo–liberal globalisation, thus still leaves open at least the question of whether nationally– or industrially–based internationals – or something rather different – are most appropriate for a new *union, labour* or *general* internationalism in the era of globalisation (for which, see later below).

The *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* is an organisation with 100 years of tradition behind it, it is backed by the overwhelming majority of Northern national unions, it won the trade union cold war, it has recruited to its ranks the major new *radical* national unions of the South, it claims 124 million members, and it looks set to eventually gain those of China and Russia³? So why is it today in question and even in a mood of self–questioning? It is, I think, because this international confederation, continues to express the national/industrial/colonial (NIC) capitalism which gave it birth and shape. The ICFTU is an international confederation of national(ist) union federations; themselves historically representing the male industrial worker in large–scale capitalist or state enterprise; seeking from employers and governments, recognition, protection and representation within the state–nation and a world of such. This tradition is one of competition/collaboration with Taylorism (the mass–production assembly line), Fordism (workers paid enough to become mass consumers of their own mass products), Keynesianism (social redistribution and welfare from growth) and State–Nationalism (workers defined as national citizens, in distinction from, competition with, and even war against, others). The ideology, institutions and procedures of 'social partnership' have become hegemonic since the creation in 1919, under considerable labour movement pressure, of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The ICFTU has internalised the tripartism of the ILO⁴. To tripartism there was added, during the Cold War, the ideology of 'free' trade unionism, thus tending to identify the ICFTU with the 'free world', led by the USA⁵. And to this there was added, as colonialism (with which the ICFTU was complicit) collapsed, the ideology of 'development' toward some implicit Swedish social utopia or Californian cornucopia. The international organisation was built on the model of the era, a nation–state based and formally representative–democratic body, addressed primarily to competition/collaboration with the other union internationals and the lobbying of inter–state organs. The internationalism this produced was a 'national internationalism' – the winning of social–democratic rights and standards within the liberal–democratic state–nation, and the gaining of such state–nations for those workers denied this (Apartheid South Africa, Communist Poland).

On its 50th anniversary, a special issue of the ICFTU's *Trade Union World* (1999) presented itself in terms of 'How the ICFTU Has Influenced Global Developments Year after Year'. The impressive recent history of the ICFTU (v.d. Linden 2000) – which shares this institutional–evolutionary perspective – nonetheless reveals many problematic aspects of its half century: these include intimate, even symbiotic, relations with states, capital, empires and blocs (also within the West!), and even with their intelligence agencies. Equally revealed, and equally problematic, is the extent to which ICFTU policy has been determined by its major Northern national member organisations, and by the internecine, if customarily confidential/concealed, conflicts of its leading unions and officers. Indeed, one comes away from this book with the impression that the ICFTU is not so much the major tradition and leading force within the international labour movement as an international office or pressure

group, relating to other national and inter-state and employers' organisations, quite separately from what might be going on amongst workers on the shopfloor. This feeling is reinforced by the Conclusion to the 1972–1990s chapter of the above-mentioned book, which quotes one prominent Northern national leader's words to its 1975 Congress 'I do not know how many people in your own country are deeply aware and conscious of the existence of the ICFTU, but I suspect in my country it is very few...' (516) The author of this book-length, chapter, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick (2000) concedes the point, and recognises other limitations, but asserts that

many workers in Africa, Chile or other trouble spots, where their colleagues have been arrested or killed, and others rescued through the intervention of the ICFTU or its affiliates, may well be aware of it, whether or not they know its name.

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Assuming this to be true, it still suggests a body more akin to the International Committee of the Red Cross than an international SMO (social movement organisation – a useful Americanism). One must avoid either demonising or dismissing the ICFTU. If workers had wanted a different ICFTU (or a different international union body), they would have organised to achieve such. The ICFTU could and possibly should be seen as operating a defensive and self-limiting operation, within and under NIC capitalism, and despite the competition of Communist unionism from the East and of Radical–Nationalist/Populist unionism in the South.

Despite its virtual collapse, and its barely more than virtual contemporary existence, the nature of such Communist competition is not without continuing interest. The origins of the *World Federation of Trade Unions* lie with the inter-state alliance (the Allies) that defeated the fascist one (the Axis) in World War Two⁶. They also lie, however, in the wave of popular labour, democratic, nationalist and revolutionary feeling that accompanied this. That the movement dynamic was subordinate to the inter-state one is revealed by the speed with which the WFTU divided on Cold War lines in 1947–9. The rapidity of the split was, however, also due to an earlier cold war – between Social–Democratic and Communist unions, going back to the time that the Profintern, or Red International of Labour Unions (RILU), was created by the Communists in 1920 (MacShane 1992). After the 1949 split the WFTU retained the state-controlled unions in the Communist world, the Communist-led unions in the West and the Communist and some of the Radical–Nationalist unions in the South. In its efforts at expansion into this apparently-promising world area, the WFTU reproduced, though against greater odds, the patron–client relations of the Western unions. Its solidarity, publicity and educational activities were more oriented toward winning labour and state allies for the Communist world than either increasing class-consciousness, autonomy and combativity, confronting capitalism or overthrowing authoritarian states (except where Western-subordinated). During a 50-year history, the 'revolutionary' WFTU never, for example, produced anything on how to organise a strike – national or international⁷. Indeed, the main activity of the WFTU seems to have been that of organising international conferences, all of which pleaded for a 'reunification of the international trade union movement', each of which ended with the call for a follow-up conference.

At the time of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Czech working class ignored (actually, was ignorant of) the WFTU, although the

latter was headquartered in Prague. The WFTU Secretariat briefly recovered a democratic and proletarian nerve by condemning the invasion – perhaps the only international Communist front organisation to have ever publicly criticised the Soviet Union. But this little, late gesture of autonomy was buried at a Council meeting some months later. That this required the switching off translation equipment when a Maoist Japanese union representative tried to speak, only reveals the bankruptcy of this organisation in the year that authoritarianism and conservatism were being questioned on the streets world-wide.

The WFTU continues to exist, and this in two equally problematic senses. The first is as a number of modest offices and modestly-paid officers, and a series of conferences and publications with a striking similarity to those of 30 years ago. The second is as a persistent myth, perpetuated by left, militant or anti-imperialist unionists – and by some younger-generation leftist researchers. These would seem to be searching for an alternative to the ICFTU, but then by looking backward or sideways rather than forward. The only evidence that the WFTU has itself learned something from struggles against contemporary capitalism is the creation in 2000 of its own website (see Resources). This website, however, also reveals that the WFTU is still heavily dependent on the membership of state-controlled unions from the remaining Communist countries and the Arab world. For the rest, this remnant of the romantic, insurrectionary, but state-socialist, tradition, appears to be seeking a return to the world of nation states that gave it birth.

The more general search for alternatives for, or to, the ICFTU is today marked by rather more contemporary concerns and challenges. One has to do with the role of a literally *international* confederation in times of globalisation. The ICFTU is an institution formally subordinate to national(ist) unions, and – in terms of the politics of power and money that have dominated the ICFTU historically – to its richest and most-powerful members. It is at the peak of a pyramidal structure several removes – and gatekeepers – away from any flesh-and-blood workers⁸. It is also an institution heavily incorporated into a traditional world of inter-state institutions, with much of its energy addressed to lobbying these. The second major problem, to my mind, is the virtual invisibility of the ICFTU. Here is an organisation with 124 million members – and rising – which has no presence at all in the global media or culture, whether dominant, popular or alternative.

The ICFTU is changing. Both the extent and limits to this change were revealed by its Millennial Congress, Durban, South Africa, 2000 (see South African Labour Bulletin 2000). Reflecting on it, shortly afterwards, ICFTU General Secretary, Bill Jordan said:

[I]n periods of revolutionary change, and we are in one now, we must be able to think and act outside the straight-jacket of our traditions...The trade union movement, once again, needs new ideas for the needs of new workers, new occupations, new forms of work organisation, new employment relationships. (Jordan 2000)

Congress thus decided on a 'millennial review' of the organisation to confront such challenges. We have, however, no evidence that this review will be carried out in front of even the member unions, far less with the participation of the members of its members, nor after consultation with the radical-democratic and internationalist public that the ICFTU is currently

courting.

The ITSs are the oldest international union organisations. They are currently undergoing a process of merger, consolidation and re-definition. I deal here only with the one I am most familiar with, and that has been most written about. The *International Transportworkers Federation* (ITF) came out of the wave of transportworker protest and action, particularly in the Europe of the 1890s–1920s⁹. During the interwar years it was a significant part of the Social–Democratic union internationalism that was opposed to the rise of fascism whilst keeping its distance from the Soviet Union. The ITF also established its place in relationship to the ILO, created to solve 'the social problem' after World War I. Despite its entry here into international collective bargaining, the ITF continued to support mass mobilisation and international industrial action. It also produced (or hosted) an international Social–Democratic union leader of considerable historical stature and contemporary relevance, Edo Fimmen¹⁰. It actively supported anti-fascist movements and underground unions within fascist states. During World War Two the ITF contributed significantly to, and was supported by, the British and US anti-Nazi war efforts, thus discovering the benefits of collaboration with liberal–democratic states – and their intelligence operations¹¹. ITF collaboration with US intelligence during World War II, led to its involvement with the CIA during the Cold War, particularly in the violent repression of Communist dockworker unions in France and Italy, as well as in the even more violent repression of Communist and radical–nationalist unionism in Latin America and Africa.

During the 50 years after 1945, the ITF developed as at least a minor 'transnational actor' within the 'international system' (Reinalda 1997). Significant here is the ITF's longstanding campaign concerning sailors under so-called Flags of Convenience (FoC). This has been considered a model of union internationalism under globalisation: FoC ships are registered beyond national union or government reach, with shipowner–friendly states; crew are hired from yet other cheap–labour countries; effective solidarity action has been often taken by workers outside this particular industry. Its FoC activity involves the ITF in international negotiations, and results in equally international collective agreements, including a shipowner–collected but ITF–administered welfare fund. Through such action the ITF has not only recovered millions of dollars in back–pay for crew. It also has a well–financed welfare function. Dozens of union–nominated or approved port inspectors monitor and assist sailors worldwide. The question arises, however, whether what we have here is not a top–down operation, in which the ITF provides admittedly valuable services for a Third World labour force that has no direct, or even indirect, control over its benefactor.

ITF–affiliated dockers have historically played an important role in solidarity with these sailors, who evidently come from other countries and another industry. When, on the other hand, the ITF–affiliated Liverpool dockworkers called for international solidarity during their heroic, desperate but nonetheless innovatory strike against a triumphant British neo–liberalism in 1995–8, the ITF had at least two possible reasons for failing to support them. The first is that these were, in a manner of speaking, subjects of one particular national affiliate of the ITF. (The British Transport and General Workers Union was itself reluctant to fully and openly support the strike). The second reason is that, given its role as collective–bargaining agent for international FoC crew, it was registered as a union under anti–union labour legislation in Britain, and was therefore unable to take the requested solidarity action without risking its

funds and/or its headquarters. One of the ITF's port inspectors in San Francisco resigned, in public protest at ITF policy toward the strike.

Regarding international transport policy, a longstanding matter of ITF concern, it apparently still

believes in a rational, co-operative and publicly planned transport system, both nationally and internationally co-ordinated to provide an efficient and integrated service for goods and passenger transport. Broader social costs and benefits should be taken into account in transport planning, because of transport's social function. Current international trends to liberalise and deregulate transport are seen by the ITF as a step backwards from such a public service concept. The art will be to find a proper middle road between 'the extremes of a planned transport industry and its complete liberalisation'. (Reinalda 1997:31)

This literally middle-of-the-road policy places the ITF alongside the more rational and farsighted international bureaucrats and technocrats, whilst accepting – actually assuming – its capitalist parameters. This is in itself consistent with a bureaucratic vision of internationalism, as a relation between national union organisations, rather than between workers. In so far as the ITF is giving recognition to the newer social movements, this also tends to imply an alliance with national or international NGOs, rather than the creation of direct contacts between workers and activists in allied movements. Whilst the ITSs will continue to exist, there therefore seems no particular reason to assume that they are specially equipped for the new era. They share many of the characteristics of the ICFTU. And any traditional 'industrial' specificity is being eroded by the changing structure of capital and a wave of largely defensive ITS mergers. These can only exceptionally pretend to match the continually changing geometry of capital – which is today changing sites, products/services, ownership and employment forms with increasing rapidity¹². The ICFTU and ITF, will, I think, inevitably add new elements to the old model of international trade unionism. The WFTU is likely to remain simply as a stark warning of what can happen if one cannot come to terms with a past tradition, recognise the demands of the day, and shape oneself to meet the future. If international unionism is *not* to remain a prisoner of its past, seeking a return to some golden age of partnership between Labour, State Capital (now on a world scale, and including selected NGOs?), it is surely going to need an understanding of labour internationalism appropriate to our globalised capitalist disorder¹³.

2. Conceiving a new labour internationalism

There is increasing talk, by academics and unionists alike, of some kind of international or global 'social movement unionism' (Ashwin 2000, Bezuidenhout 1999, Moody 1997). There is, however, a strange reluctance to conceptualise this (Munck 2000 is a partial exception). I therefore want here – and in the hope of provoking a critical response – to present three inter-related pieces of conceptualisation relevant to the matter.

*A new social unionism*¹⁴. By this I mean one surpassing existing models of 'economic', 'political' or 'political-economic' unionism, by addressing itself to all forms of work, by taking on socio-cultural forms, and addressing itself to civil society. Such a union model would be one which, amongst other

characteristics, would be:

- Struggling within and around waged work, not simply for better wages and conditions but for increased worker and union control over the labour process, investments, new technology, relocation, subcontracting, training and education policies. Such strategies and struggles should be carried out in dialogue and common action with affected communities and interests so as to avoid conflicts (e.g. with environmentalists, with women) and to positively increase the appeal of the demands;
- Struggling against hierarchical, authoritarian and technocratic working methods and relations, for socially–useful and environmentally–friendly products, for a reduction in the hours of work, for the distribution of that which is available and necessary, for the sharing of domestic work, and for an increase in free time for cultural self–development and self–realisation;
- Intimately related with the movements of other non–unionised or non–unionisable working classes or categories (petty–commodity sector, homeworkers, peasants, housewives, technicians and professionals);
- Intimately related to other non– or multi–class democratic movements (base movements of churches, women's, residents', ecological, human–rights and peace movements, etc) in the effort to create a powerful and diverse civil society;
- Intimately related to other (potential) allies as an autonomous, equal and democratic partner, neither claiming to be, nor subordinating itself to, a 'vanguard' or 'sovereign' organisation or power;
- Taking up the new social issues within society at large, as they arise for workers specifically and as they express themselves within the union itself (struggle against authoritarianism, majoritarianism, bureaucracy, sexism, racism, etc.);
- Favouring shopfloor democracy and encouraging direct horizontal relations both between workers and between the workers and other popular/democratic social forces;
- Active on the terrain of education, culture and communication, stimulating worker and popular culture, supporting initiatives for democracy and pluralism both inside and outside the dominant institutions or media, locally, nationally, globally;
- Open to networking both within and between organisations, understanding the value of informal, horizontal, flexible coalitions, alliances and interest groups to stimulate organisational democracy, pluralism and innovation.

Various writers have, over the years, identified 'social movement unionism' with 1) particular national organisations, 2) left or militant union tendencies and 3) the South¹⁵. This represents, I believe, an analytical, theoretical and strategic error. *Analytically*, it tends to identify as 'social movement unions' those involved in various kinds of *labour–popular* alliance, primarily during (semi–)insurrectionary movements against military/right–authoritarian regimes. *Theoretically*, it tends to reduce a conceptual category to an analytical one, thus preventing its critical application to the evidence offered. *Strategically*, it tends to make it a characteristic of one world area – at a time in which globalisation is homogenising/diversifying the world in ways that both require and make possible the search for universal (not universalistic) alternatives.

A new labour internationalism. In so far as this addresses itself to the problems of a GNI capitalism (of which inter–state relations are but one part), this would have to see itself as part of a general global solidarity movement, from which it must learn and to which it must contribute. A new kind of labour internationalism implies, amongst other things:

- Moving from the international relations of union or other officials towards face-to-face relations of concerned labouring people at the shopfloor, community or grassroots level;
- Surpassing dependence on the centralised, bureaucratic and rigid model of the pyramidal international organisation by stimulating the self-empowering, decentralised, horizontal, democratic and flexible model of the international information network;
- Moving from an 'aid model' (one-way flows of money and material from the 'rich, powerful, free' unions, workers or others), to a 'solidarity model' (two-way or multi-directional flows of political support, information and ideas);
- Moving from verbal declarations, appeals and conferences to political activity, creative work, visits, or direct financial contributions (which will continue to be necessary) by the working people concerned;
- Basing international solidarity on the expressed daily needs, values and capacities of ordinary working people, not simply on those of their representatives;
- Recognising that whilst labour is not the privileged bearer of internationalism, it is essential to it, and therefore linking up with other democratic internationalisms, so as to reinforce wage-labour struggles and surpass a workerist internationalism;
- Overcoming ideological, political and financial dependency in international solidarity work by financing internationalist activities from worker or publicly-collected funds, and carrying out independent research activities and policy formulation;
- Replacing the political/financial coercion, the private collusion and public silences of the traditional internationalisms, with a frank, friendly, constructive and public discourse of equals, made available to interested workers.
- Recognising that there is no single site or level of international struggle and that, whilst the shopfloor, grassroots and community may be the base, the traditional formal terrains can be used and can also be influenced;
- Recognising that the development of a new internationalism requires contributions from and discussion with labour movements in West, East and South, as well as within and between other socio-geographic regions.

Elements of such an understanding can be found within both international union pronouncements and practice. It is, I think, becoming the common sense amongst left labour internationalists (see, for example, Lambert Forthcoming), although some still seem to consider labour (or even union) internationalism as the one that leads, or ought to lead, the new wave of struggles against neo-liberal globalisation (Open World Conference 2000a). Yet others are beginning to go beyond such ideal types to spell out global labour/popular and democratic alternatives to 'globalisation-from-above' in both programmatic and relational terms (Brecher, Costello and Smith 2000).

One last specification is necessary, to distinguish between the concepts of 'internationalism', 'labour internationalism' and 'union internationalism'. Within social movement discourse, *internationalism* is customarily associated with 19th century labour, with socialism and Marxism. It *may* be projected backwards so as to include the ancient religious universalisms, or the liberal cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment. And it *should* be extended, in both the 19th and 20th century, so as to include women's/feminist, pacifist, anti-colonial and human rights forms. In so far as it is limited to these two centuries, and to a 'world of nation states', we need a new term for the era of globalisation. Some talk of *transnationalism*. I prefer *global solidarity*, in so far as it is addressed to globalisation, its discontents and alternatives. As for

labour internationalism this refers to a wide range of past and present labour-related ideas, strategies and practices, including those of co-operatives, labour and socialist parties, socialist intellectuals, culture, the media and even sport. As for *union internationalism* this is restricted to the primary form of worker self-articulation during the NIC era. Trade union internationalism has so displaced or dominated labour internationalism during the later 20th century as to be commonly conflated with the latter. Yet it is precisely *union internationalism* that is most profoundly in crisis, and in question, under our GNI capitalism.

In what follows I want to consider – in the light of the above – the ways in which international labour/labour internationalism is either coming, or failing to come, to terms with the new global solidarity movements. Once again, traditional international union institutions will remain at the centre of the analysis, as will the question of forms and procedures.

3. International Labour's Millennial Dialogue

'International Labour's Millennial Dialogue' is my name for something that exists empirically and that I wish to further programmatically. We have, in 1999–2000, seen increasing numbers of union, labour, socialist and academic dialogues on labour and globalisation. These have been obviously stimulated by the coincidence of the millennium with what we have to call a 'globalisation crisis'. The latter means not only the crisis of *labour* but that of the *neo-liberal globalisation project* such. Amongst the conferences held we must note, firstly, the major international initiative of the ICFTU and ILO, in the form of an open, bilingual, electronic Conference on Organised Labour in the Century (COL21, see Resources) in 1999–2000. I am aware, secondly, of nine or ten international labour events on neo-liberalism/globalisation, mostly in the period 1999–2000. These have been customarily organised either beneath, at the periphery, across or outside the traditional international union structures.

COL21: the dialogue of which millennium? Despite its electronic form, its international accessibility, and its apparent openness, this is a dialogue largely imprisoned by the history of its two sponsors and their joint interest in preserving or restoring their past centrality to the world of international labour relations. With one exception (that of left labour specialist Richard Hyman (1999)) the launching statements of the institutional sponsors and invitees were cast within the traditional discourses of 'industrial relations', 'social partnership' and 'development'. Other keywords, such as 'international solidarity', 'ICFTU' and 'ILO' – surely all central to the future of organised labour – did not come under discussion, far less challenge. My rule-of-thumb analysis of COL21, at an early moment, suggests that those participating were mostly the usual suspects: White, Anglo-Saxon, Male (as, with the exception of the Chilean Director General of the ILO, Juan Somavia, were all the initial agenda-setters!). Most of the background papers commissioned by the ILO were restricted to unions-and-globalisation-in-my-country. Whilst conference contributors provided much information on the site, and occasionally took critical positions, there was little or no engagement with the opening statements, nor were participants in noticeable dialogue with each other. When the Spanish-language site was first launched, most of the messages were those of greeting. If, later, this particular site became more lively, this may have been due to a more-enterprising web-mistress¹⁶. Occasional personal enquiries, both in the Americas and Western Europe, suggest, moreover, that critically-minded international labour specialists have not been much interested in participating in this experiment, although they may

have lurked (participated passively) there. None of which, however, means that the experiment should be dismissed. On the contrary, this criticism should be considered a provocation to systematic research on COL21, including its sponsorship and management, its subjects, discourses, participation and impact – and the similarities/differences between the English and Spanish sites. The point is that we (I risk speaking also for the reader here) quite urgently need such a discussion site, and it does not yet really exist¹⁷.

The unofficial conferences: which dialogue of the millennium? To the seven conferences I have previously noted, I have to add a significant forerunner from 1988 and two latecomers, at the end of 2000¹⁸. These events have been taking place on the institutional, political, educational and academic margins, or bases, of the international trade union structures. Most have taken place within the traditional capitalist core. But several have not (Korea, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil). And those that have been US-sited have, in most cases of which I am aware, involved Southern participants, although only exceptionally those from the ex-Communist world.

I have elsewhere commented on another such conference/network (Waterman 1999), so I will here confine myself to the Open World Conference in Defence of Trade Union Independence and Democratic Rights (OWC), held in San Francisco, February 11–14, 2000 (Open World Conference 2000b). This was probably the largest of the informal millennial events, attended by 560 people from 56 countries, 200 of them from outside North America. It was a Trotskyist initiative, was addressed by the leaders of the party concerned, but restricted the blowing of this particular trumpet and succeeded in involving people from beyond the traditional left. It was, moreover, entirely funded by unions, community and labour movement organisations – which raised the \$11–14,000 to cover the costs of the event. Nine workshops were held, covering such subjects as women workers, immigrant workers, privatisation and deregulation, civil society and NGOs, peace and self-determination, racism and democratic rights, union incorporation into corporate and/or state structures (at every level), labour and the environment. The conference also paid considerable attention to the role of the UN and to the ILO – both seen as abandoning their traditional roles and being incorporated, in subordinate position, into the neo-liberal globalisation project (Sandri 1999). This was an impressive, even heroic, initiative, revealing the capacity of a traditional vanguardist socialist party to come out energetically, broadly and internationally against neo-liberal globalisation. And suggesting the willingness of organisations representing hundreds of thousands of members to respond to such an appeal. The OWC, moreover, eventually established its own website, produced a video and printed reports (see Resources). Much of this has been reproduced in other languages

I wish, however, to question certain features of this event, some common to the other 'alternative' conferences mentioned, some common to that of the ICFTU itself. The *first* is its defensive character, from its title forward. The language is that of militant resistance: 'denounce', 'preserve', 'steer clear of...attempts to coopt', 'beat back', 'fight against', 'defend', 'halt', 're-nationalise', 'refuse'. There is here no sign of the movement (in Latin American feminist parlance) 'from opposition to proposition'. The *second* notable feature is, for me, the assumption that the working class is the prime victim of neo-liberalism. 'Working class' is here stretched to embrace all poor people (women, peasants, indigenous peoples, urban residents), who are thus denied any other significant interest or identity than that of unionised male urban workers in large-scale enterprise. There follows from this, *thirdly*, the assumption that the

(inter)national union movement is, or should be, the leading force for the reversal (sic) of neo-liberalism. And the assumption that any non-traditional institution, practice or discourse – 'NGOs', 'civil society', 'so-called globalisation', even national or international union mergers – are, as such, instruments of the class enemy, that they debilitate or disorient the class struggle. (This is particularly paradoxical given that the OWC, or the International Liaison Committee behind it, is itself, of course, an NGO). I note, *sixthly*, significant lacunae. Although there was a session on/of women, the sole demand of the conference concerned an ILO instrument on pregnancy leave; there was no mention of sexual harassment and rights, and therefore nothing about patriarchy *within* either the inter/national union movement or the ILC/IWC itself. And, despite one woman's proposal for an international committee of working-class women, led by women, there was no reference to feminism, surely the major theoretical/ideological force both informing and stimulating international working women's struggles over the last 20 years. There was, *seventhly*, no critique of traditional international trade unionism as such¹⁹. And, consistent with this, there was, *finally*, no workshop, no statement – and certainly no discussion – on the *meaning* of internationalism: whether yesterday or today; whether that of the unions, labour, socialists or more generally. The conference, in sum, was marked not only by a posture of radical oppositionism but also by the ideology of labourism/classism. Its internationalism, by default, remains largely that of the NIC period.

Let me risk a generalisation – or offer a proposition – about the informal labour events: they customarily have their feet on the new terrain of neo-liberal globalisation, but their heads are often in an old world of ideologies and institutions. This is, of course, a criticism, but it also has to be a *recognition*. The organisers *and participants* in most of these often innovative events still seem more at home with the discourses of imperialism or national-protectionism; to be still wedded to the union (and/or labour/socialist party) as the primary or sole institutions for struggle against globalisation; to think of internationalism in terms of relations between national, local, industrial or company-based unions; to understand international dialogue as 'exchange of experiences' and, often, of 'the national' as the privileged or sole terrain of resistance and reassertion. Their procedures, too – sometimes despite contrary intentions – tend to reproduce traditional union or party practices. Some of these projects still consider theirs as the privileged voice of the new labour internationalism (the vanguard conference? The vanguard network?). Or, even if they don't have such pretensions, they do not seem to be aware or take account of the others, even where they overlap in focus and intent, and even where some participants are present at one or more of the others. All of this, could and possibly should be taken as a sign of 1) the novelty of the networks and networking, 2) of a continuing globalisation shock, as 3) militant inter/nationalist activists grasp for old tools to dislocate a radically transformed capitalism, which, as suggested above, really requires radically transformed ones.

Every reason, therefore, I think, to avoid posing the informal events in opposition to COL21, or even to the Millennium Congress of the ICFTU. In some ways, in certain areas, on certain issues, the ICFTU may be in advance of the OWC (on women, on relations with NGOs). I think we therefore need, rather, to see all these conferences as a single new international *agora* (both public space and market place) for which a new map is necessary, of which a full picture still has to be painted.

4. Communications, culture and computers: from space to cyberspace?

The necessity for labour and its internationalism to have communicational/cultural and electronic form was revealed dramatically by the 'Battle of Seattle' against the World Trade Organisation, late-1999. The initiative for the demonstration came from a network of NGOs – or a network of networks of NGOs. As far as I am aware, US and international labour participated significantly but neither led nor determined the nature of this event. Rather was it the other way round. International union participants and observers tended to distance themselves from those parts of the event they did not themselves participate in or control. International mobilisation took place largely through the Internet. Protest activity was largely in the hands of the Direct Action Network, which trained people in flexible but combined forms of action. The novelty and richness of this multi-faceted event are thus expressed by Naomi Klein (2000):

Despite...common ground, these campaigns have not coalesced into a single movement. Rather they are intricately and tightly linked to one another, much as 'hotlinks' connect their websites on the internet. This analogy is more than coincidental: the communication technology that facilitates these campaigns is shaping the movement in its own image. Thanks to the net, mobilisations unfold with sparse bureaucracy and minimal hierarchy; forced consensus and laboured manifestos are fading into the background, replaced by a culture of constant, loosely structured and sometimes compulsive information-swapping [...] The decentralised nature of these campaigns is not a source of incoherence and fragmentation but *a reasonable, even ingenious, adaptation to changes in the broader culture.* (23–4. My emphasis. PW)

The US unions, providing some 50 percent of total participation, got involved late, organised separate activities (in a stadium and a hall), and tried to marshal their march away from where the police were brutalising non-violent resisters (not the tiny minority trashing the High Street multinationals). The international trade unions were invisible in the dominant media, although marginally more so in the alternative videos made (see Resources). Some national or international union leaders strayed from or even rejected the cautious AFL-CIO policy and strategy. A number of major US unions, and numerous unionists, simply broke ranks and joined the rest of the demonstrators. But, whilst the ecologists turned out dressed as turtles, the trade unionists turned out dressed as...trade unionists. Where the non-violent resisters put their bodies on the line, the US union leaders went down momentarily on their knees in prayerful attitude²⁰. Result: the 50 percent of unionists got five percent of the visual coverage in the major international (meaning US) news magazines! One could only put this down to 'media bias' if the forms of union expression had been as original, attractive, dramatic or ludic as those of the other demonstrators.

With a few notable exceptions, the international labour movement has not yet understood the significance of all this. Jean-Paul Marthoz (2000), a journalist long associated with the ICFTU, recognises the increasing centrality of the media within the globalisation process, and the potential of both the media and media workers in the struggle against globalisation. But – confronted by media coverage of the radicals and radicalism at Seattle – he considers the public

projection of Seattle a matter for 'caution rather than euphoria'. *Why not both?* And why, to return to international unions and the international media, is not international labour prominently identified with and involved in the new international movement for the democratisation of communication (Voices 21)? Again, it seems, international labour is to respond to the new globalised public sphere and new forms of collective self-expression in defensive/aggressive rather than in learning/creative mode.

Such a literally conservative response has been long identifiable in international union attitudes toward the new information and communication technology (ICT). This began, almost 20 years ago, with the ICFTU's failure to take up the free offer of a Scandinavian social-democratic computer specialist of an open-access database, called – ironically in the circumstances – *Unite*²¹. It continues today with what one must call the ICFTU's misguided attempt to establish and control a 'union' domain name (like .com, .uk, .org) on the Internet²². Increasing numbers of international union websites do provide a welcome increase in access to information on their own activities. But this represents only a belated response to ICT as instrument (faster, cheaper, further-reaching) not as cyberspace (another kind of place, with unlimited possibilities for international dialogue, creativity and the invention/discovery/development of new values, new attitudes, new dialogues). So even the brave new multi-union website, *Global Unions*, only represents a bigger, faster, further-reaching union magazine, news and, possibly, mobilisation service²³. These are, then, primarily organs of *propaganda*²⁴, which can only incidentally serve the creation of those dialogical practices and dialectical understandings necessary to our new complex, globalised, capitalist reality.

For more globalisation-appropriate practices we have to turn to international labour's more marginal media, whether magazines such as *International Trade Union Rights* (which has run a quite extensive discussion of the problematic issue of international trade/rights linkage), or websites run by NGOs and/or individuals, such as Eric Lee's news (plus) service, *Labour Start*, or to left communication specialist, Richard Barbrook's provocative proposals for new principles of labour organisation. Barbrook understands ICT not simply as something workers or unions can use, it is something that they produce, and that also produces workers, and workers needing unions of another kind:

As in other industries, workers in the emerging digital economy also need to defend their common interests. However, most of the existing labour organisations are not responding quickly enough to the changes in people's working lives. Although formed to fight the employers, industrial trade unions were also created in the image of the Fordist factory: bureaucratic, centralised and nationalist. For those working within the digital economy, such labour organisations seem anachronistic. Instead, new forms of unionism need to be developed which can represent the interests of digital workers. As well as reforming the structures of existing labour organisations, digital workers should start co-operating with each other using their own methods. As they're already on-line, people could organise to advance their common interests through the Net. Formed within the digital economy, a virtual trade union should emphasise new principles of labour organisation: artisanal, networked and global. (Barbrook 1999)

And, for a yet more general understanding of the role of ICT in relationship to internationalism, we again need to go beyond the particular world and worldview of labour, to a reflection on 'Women @ Internet':

Networks – such as women's, environmental, ethnic and other social movements networks – are the location of new political actors and the source of promising cultural practices and possibilities. It is thus possible to speak of a cultural politics of cyberspace and the production of cybercultures that resist, transform or present alternatives to the dominant virtual and real worlds. This cybercultural politics can be most effective if it fulfils two conditions: awareness of the dominant worlds that are being created by the same technologies on which the progressive networks rely (including awareness of how power works in the world of transnational networks and flows); and an ongoing tacking back and forth between cyberpolitics (political activism of the Internet) and what I call place politics, or political activism in the physical locations at which the networker sits and lives. (Escobar 1999:32)

Conclusion: networking, communication, dialogue

I have earlier suggested that the fundamental problem of trade union internationalism under a GNC is one of forms and practices, with those of the trade union being heavily marked by the NIC capitalism in and against which it took shape. This means that criticism of union bureaucracy, hierarchy, ideology (perennial complaint of the traditional left) are somewhat out of place – or out of date. We really need an additional, or even an alternative, principle of worker self-articulation (both joining and expression) appropriate to our era. (We need one, in other words, that would continually and effectively undermine the reproduction of bureaucracy, hierarchy and ideology, that occurs also within 'radical' and 'revolutionary' unions).

As our last two quotes suggest, this principle is the *network*, the practice is *networking*. There is no need to fetishise the network nor demonise the organisation. 'Networking' is also a way of understanding human inter-relations, and we can therefore see an organisation in network terms, just as we can look at a network in organisational ones. It remains nonetheless true that the movement from an NIC to a GNI capitalism is also one from an organised to a networked capitalism (Castells 1996–8). It is from the international labour networks, and networking, that today tend to come the new initiatives, speed, creativity and flexibility. For unions, or socialists, to condemn, or even criticise, 'NGOs' as lacking in 'democracy' or 'representativity' is to misunderstand the new principles, forms and practices of radical-democratic social movements. The latter are centrally concerned with empowerment through information, ideas, images, *son et lumi*, values. In so far as we are talking of radical-democratic networks, networking or – indeed – NGOs, then they represent a major source of, or resource for, renovation and movement both within civil society, in relation to capital and state – and within or between such organisations as trade unions. An international unionism concerned to be radically-democratic and internationalist will learn this, or it will stagnate. International union networking, moreover, will stagnate if it does not recognise itself as a part of a radical-democratic internationalist project that goes far beyond the unions, far beyond labour problems.

'Networking' is a term that relates to *communication* rather than institutions. And, in so far as international labour networking is not to reproduce the dominant values of a GNI capitalism, it must be informed by and produce a radical–democratic style of communication – and sense of culture. I call this a 'global solidarity culture'. This finds dramatic expression in *Voices 21* (1999), itself produced by an international network of democratic communications academics, activists and practitioners. This movement concerns itself with increasing access to the media, the right to communicate, diversity of expression, security and privacy. The international trade union organisations are, as earlier indicated, notably absent from this new international social movement. This is in part because of their institutional self–definition, in part because communications workers and unions tend to be as fearful of 'public interference' in their territory as they are of media magnates or state censorship. Yet labour has a long and rich cultural history and has in the past innovated and even led popular, democratic and even avantgarde cultural movements. International trade unionism, once again, has to either surpass its reductionist self–definition or remain invisible in the international media arena, which is increasingly challenging and even replacing the institutional ones as the central site of democratic contestation and deliberation.

Debate is a continuation of war by other means. The intention is to defeat or destroy the other, whether this is an idea, movement or person. Discussion implies listening to the other, with no necessary implication of surpassing or transforming the exchange. *Dialogue* implies a dialectic, a process in which initial positions are transformed and a new synthesis reached. In talking above about international labour's millennial dialogue I was speaking both descriptively and prescriptively. There are such debates and discussions taking place; they ought to take dialogical form, within, between and without (outside) the international labour movement (Waterman Forthcoming b).

A personal note: Coming from the tradition of Marxist polemic (including that of Lenin, whose major works are all devalued because of their polemical form and intent), I have had to fight my way out of this box and toward something more like a discussion or a dialogue. Another box, of course, is that of 'overblown academic drive!' (an international union officer's response to a piece of mine on a labour discussion list, in 1990, toward the end of the last international labour movement Ice Age). To have established at least a public *discussion* with Bill Jordan, General Secretary of the ICFTU (Waterman 2000) is a minor sign that the times may be a–changing. There are other indications that the international labour institutions are beginning to surpass the defensive/aggressive mode in responding to public criticism. Over the last years I have been finding myself in increasing, and increasingly meaningful, dialogue with labour and other internationalists. Some of this is revealed in the work of the internationalist activist/academic, Rob Lambert (Forthcoming), although this piece may not reveal that the particular dialogue started 15 or more years ago. This, of course, has been a relatively easy one, given personal friendship and mutual respect, though it is not without its moments of tension and frustration. More recent, and tentative, are the public – or private – exchanges with international union organisations and officers. Whilst private discussions could be interpreted, by my radical political/academic friends, as a sign of my naivety on the one hand, and of institutional incorporation on the other, I see them rather as a discussion, an experience or experiment, from which both parties could move to an open dialogue later. In any case, I am not interested in any such private discussion, any more than paid consultations or evaluations, unless they permit to improve on publicised pieces like this one, that serve to better forward an open dialogue. I would like to hope that such a

dialogical intention is present in this piece of writing, despite forceful criticism of the traditional institutions. Readers will inform me of the contrary (one already has).

Such international and internationalist dialogue on labour internationally is not simply *facilitated* by the web. The *logic* of the computer is one of feedback. A unidirectional, one-to-many, centralising, use of the computer, for purposes of control, is a denial of this logic and its possibilities. The military/industrial/commercial/statist Internet and hyper-capitalist web are themselves *subversive* of capitalist institutions and institutionalisation. As Marx said of capitalism itself (again somewhat prematurely) 150 years ago:

All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air. (Marx and Engels (1848) 1935:209).

There is no other way for us to operate within both our globalised world, and the 'real virtuality' (Castells 1996–8: Vol. I: 327–75) surrounding it and literally *informing* it, than to overcome our fear of flying. This requires of labour internationalists – whether within the institutions, on their peripheries, or somewhere–else–but–concerned–with–such, that we become, as Enzensburger (1976) said of the electronic media, 'as free as dancers, as aware as football players, as surprising as guerrillas'. And this requires – of all of us again – that we learn to dialogue with each other as we continue our struggles; that we make a road beyond capitalism whilst both walking and talking²⁵.

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- ¹ This paper is a draft contribution to Waterman and Wills (Forthcoming). It draws from, updates and adds to a long working paper (Waterman 1999), as well as a book (Waterman 1998 and Forthcoming A). It makes use of various other articles, reviews and unpublished notes. Most of these materials can be found on the Global Solidarity Dialogue/Dialogo Solidaridad Global website (for which see the Resources below). Thanks are due to Kim Scipes, Bruce Nissen and, particularly, to Dan Gallin and Jane Wills for comments on earlier versions. In so far as I have ignored or failed to understand their thoughtful private suggestions, I hope to be confronted with their public responses later.
- ² The following analysis should be compared with that of Dan Gallin (1999a), who, as past Secretary of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF), has been a participant in as well as a critical commentator on union and labour internationalism. See also Gallin (1999b, Forthcoming)
- ³ The major source for the history of the ICFTU is van der Linden (2000). Sarah Ashwin (2000) provides an informative and perceptive critique of its latest period, particularly in relationship to the ex-Communist world. She also raises the question of whether the ICFTU is not, now, moving toward 'social movement unionism' (113), a notion to which I will return. See, again Gallin (1999a).
- ⁴ 'Tripartite' suggests a pie with three equal parts. In terms of relative power, however, the ILO should surely be rather represented as a layer cake, since – with 50 percent for the State ('government') and 25 percent for Capital ('employers'), the Unions ('labour') have only the bottom 25 percent.
- ⁵ Some years ago the ICFTU appeared to give recognition to the ambiguities or limitations of the word 'free' by changing the title of its magazine from *Free Labour World* to *Trade Union World*.
- ⁶ There is not yet, to my knowledge, any academic history of the WFTU. For a brief but balanced account see Carew (2000). My characterisation here is partly based on my experience working on labour education for the WFTU in Prague, 1966–9. I have been something of a WFTU-watcher ever since.
- ⁷ Indeed, the last time any such effort was made by international Communist unionism appears to have been during the 'Class versus Class' period of the Comintern (and the Soviet Union) in the late-1920s (National Minority Movement n.d.).
- ⁸ Kjeld Aagard Jakobsen (Forthcoming), International Officer of the major Brazilian left union confederation, the CUTB, even argues that both the ICFTU and the WFTU are based on a Bolshevik model! I believe that this Bolshevik model was an adaptation of the classical German Social-Democratic one. The notion of comparing/contrasting, rather than opposing, the models and behaviour of the ICFTU and the WFTU has the makings of a nice Ph.D. project.
- ⁹ I am here largely dependent on a collective history of the ITF, edited by Bob Reinalda (1997). See also, however, International Transportworkers Federation 199?? And Couper 199?. For a more positive view of the role of the ITSs in general, see, again, Gallin (1999a).
- ¹⁰ He produced a book in the 1920s, arguing (somewhat prematurely) that European capitalism was tending to unite, and that, therefore, an international confederation of national union centres was less appropriate to the new conditions than one of ITSs (Fimmen 1924)!
- ¹¹ In private correspondence, Dan Gallin suggests that the boot was on the other foot, i.e. that it was the states and agencies that discovered the necessity of collaborating with the unions and ITSs. And, further, that, if they wished to be effective in the struggle against fascism, the unions had no alternative to such collaboration. I have no objection to such an understanding. I am rather concerned, however, with the limitations and implications of such clandestine collaboration. It provided a terrain of international operation which gave international union officers a sense of playing a role of historical importance on a world scale, but without the need for general membership participation or public knowledge.
- ¹² The one with the best claim is probably the one with the most appropriate name, Union Network International (UNI), the 'services and skills' ITS. However, as the Open World Conference (see later below) suggests, this organisation appears to believe it can ride the wave of neo-liberal globalisation, and is creating a new kind of union constituency and management to make itself a worthy interlocutor with globalised capital and the interstate

institutions serving this. One can, thus, make a virtual visit to the World Bank without leaving the union's virtual headquarters (see Resources).

- ¹³ There is little evidence that such a new understanding is forthcoming. The ICFTU is currently identified with the UN's 'Global Compact', an attempt by the United Nations to ingratiate itself with, and give an ethical aura to, multinational capital. With respect to labour, the UN's Kofi Annan has 'asked' world business to uphold a number of principles that exclude any explicit right to strike (ICFTU 2000a, b). The ICFTU also seems to be ingratiating itself with tomorrow's world power, China, despite its hostility to worker rights and union independence (China Labour Bulletin 2000). The ICFTU, and some of the ITSs, are also married to the idea of establishing a 'social clause' or 'labour standards' through the World Trade Organisation – despite the increasing disrepute accruing both to this and the other international financial institutions (Gumbrell–McCormick 2000:508–15, Waterman Forthcoming B).
- ¹⁴ I have abandoned my original concept of 'social movement unionism' to those who, as we will see below, have given this wider currency but in a more traditionally 'classist', form.
- ¹⁵ I am thinking here primarily of Lambert and Webster (1988) on Apartheid South Africa, Munck (1988:117) on the Third World generally, Seidman (1994:2–3) on South Africa and Brazil, Scipes (1996:viii–ix) on the Philippines. Munck (2000:93–4) has qualified and extended his formulation. None of these have attempted a more extensive (re)formulation of the concept. Most influential, recently, has been the use of Moody (1997), in an impressive overview of global labour. His last chapter is, indeed, entitled, 'Toward an International Social Movement Unionism!' Moody's account of this phenomenon, however, amounts to a description/prescription of a more activist and democratic unionism, that still assumes the leading role of the working class in the struggle against neoliberalism (290). Whilst promoting a more flexible, open and internationalist unionism, it is therefore limited by traditional workerist assumptions. Seattle, for which see below, shows how, under a GNI capitalism, a network of social movements can have a broader vision and more sophisticated and militant strategy than workers and unions. Assertion of the vanguard role of the working class in the struggle against neo-liberalism would seem to be empirically in error and prescriptively counter-productive.
- ¹⁶ Despite my own several attempts to get messages of different types and lengths onto COL21, and despite several promises that one would be, it took almost a year before one was published – on the Spanish site, and in English!
- ¹⁷ One exception might be San Lanfranco's Labor–List (see Resources). It has hosted one or two intensive discussions on certain international labour issues. But it is my impression that its participants are either uninterested in or feel unqualified to discuss matters relating to the international organisations and institutions.
- ¹⁸ These include the following, the sources for which are listed, where existent, in the Resources: – A 'pre-millennial' event, sponsored in 1998, on an anniversary, by the Danish General Workers Union: 'A New Global Agenda: Visions and Strategies for the 21st century'; – A union-sponsored 'World Meeting Against Globalisation and Neoliberalism', held in Brazil, September, 1999; – A Trotskyist-initiated 'Open World Conference in Defence of Trade Union Independence and Democratic Rights,' held February, 2000, in San Francisco (for which see below); – A national union/academic/education event, 'Unions and the Global Economy: Labour Education at the Crossroads,' held in Milwaukee, April 2000; – An international conference/festival on labour and the electronic media under globalisation, 'LabourMedia99', the second such, in Seoul, November 1999; – A conference on 'Trade Unionism in the 21st Century', in Johannesburg, October 1999, organised by the Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR); An international conference, 'Building a Labour Movement for Radical Change', organised in Cologne, Germany, March, 2000, by the Amsterdam-based Transnationals Information Exchange, in which one major topic was 'A New Internationalism?'. – A seminar on 'The Present Panorama of International Trade Union Structures: New Challenges and Union Strategies in the Face of Globalisation'. Organised, with foreign/international contributions, Mexico City, November 1999. Although addressed to a local audience, this shared concerns and orientations with the earlier events; – A 'Workshop on International Labour Rights and International Labour Solidarity,' at Wellesley College, outside Boston, USA, November, 2000, and with the intention of allowing an intensive exchange amongst academic, union and NGO specialists, including those from Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere; – LaborTECH 2000: 'Building New Global Unionism through Labour Media,' University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA, December 1–3, 2000. The latest in a series of such events, with significant international address and participation.
- ¹⁹ Such criticism as there was of international trade unionism was rather directed towards the new forms, particularly the earlier-mentioned Union Network International. Although the US AFL–CIO was criticised, particularly in relationship to Seattle, the ILC/OWC may have been nervous about criticising organisations to which conference participants owed

allegiance.

- 20 I leave it up to US observers to explain to us the precise historical origins and cultural import of what to me was a strange and even exotic ritual.
- 21 This proposal was even publicly promoted *within* the ICFTU by the then editor of the then *Free Labour World*, by its editor, Ian Graham (1982a, b). Graham later moved to the distinctly more communication- and computer-friendly International Chemical, Energy and Mineworkers Federation (ICEM).
- 22 This is my own conclusion from a presentation of the matter by Eric Lee (2000). ICFTU thinking here was, it seems to me, bureaucratic, technocratic and territorial. Bureaucratic in so far as it would 1) have been a relationship between offices/officers (the other party being the corporate-dominated committee that assigns Internet domain names), and 2) that it has so far apparently involved neither publicity, consultation with non-union specialists, mobilisation of the ICFTU membership or consultation with even the concerned public. Technocratic in the belief that there is a technical fix for problems of labour or democratic rights. Territorial in that it was to be the ICFTU and its allied or member unions that would decide which unions were 'real', with the right to use the domain name. The notion, finally, of creating a territorial place in cyberspace, suggests a lack of understanding of the nature of the latter. Lee suggests there are a number of cyberspace-relevant ways of establishing a union presence, and of finding labour-relevant material on the net, none of which require a domain name. These ways, moreover, appear open to labour activists armed with basic web skills, imagination and an interest in international solidarity.
- 23 And even the best of the new international printed union magazines, the IMF's excellent *Metal World*, has no letter page, far less some kind of open space for more extensive discussion. Contrast this with the two pages (of 16) provided by the internationalist *Labor Notes* in the US.
- 24 Shorter Oxford English Dictionary: '*disseminate, diffuse (statement, belief, practice)*'.
- 25 If this suggests a certain utopianism, then this, too, is a requirement for a re-invented labour internationalism. In criticising contemporary understandings of our dilemma, Ruth Levitas (2000), reminds us of the necessity of combining a dialogical utopianism (process) with visions of a post-capitalist society (place). She also reminds us, however, that an undifferentiated notion of dialogical transformation – one that ignores the increasingly conflictual interests within contemporary capitalist society – is going to obscure these conflicts and thus leave us where we are. Relevantly, for our subject matter, she illustrates her argument with a European Commission document that urges 'solidarity' between those who 'earn income from work and those who earn [sic] their income from investments' (208–9. Her sic – PW). A meaningful basis for a transformatory dialogue, she suggests, requires "a critical analysis of capitalism – aimed not (just) at saying isn't it awful, but at identifying potential points of intervention which might lead to transformation, and potential agents of that transformation". (209)

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