

Acting Together For Another World? Anti-Globalisation and Labour Organisations

Stéphane Le QUEUX *

ABSTRACT

This article considers the extent to which the anti-globalisation movement might contribute to a revival of labour politics. The starting point is an awareness that trade unions and anti-globalists do not necessarily see eye to eye so that any assumption that they can readily join forces becomes problematical. Four fault lines are identified in relation to key areas of concern: i) political alternatives; ii) participatory democracy; iii) organic cohesion and inclusion; and iv) the renewal of activism. It is pointed out that while – in the view of leading analysts in this field of inquiry – the anti-globalisation movement does indeed offer a potential source and impetus for a revitalisation, this is no tame option, especially in the context of labour corporatism. However, a sensible shift in the way in which the international trade union organisations have recently been approaching these issues may signal a repositioning of labour as a catalyst of solidarity.

Keywords: Anti-Globalisation, Labour, Revitalisation, Solidarity

* Griffith University, Australia & Inter-University Research Centre on Globalisation and Work (CRIMT), Canada

Introduction

Recent history suggests that globalisation has spawned its own opposition. From the 1999 riots of Seattle to the World Social Forum (WSF) of Porto Alegre in 2001, the beginning of the XXIst century has seen the emergence of the anti-globalisation movement as a counter hegemonic actor. Such has been the strength of this movement that Klein has argued that these eventful times may have signalled the “end of the end of history” (2002). The longevity of anti-globalisation, however, depends on the synergies between these emerging protest movements and organised labour. But whether they can join forces is an empirical question and a matter of contention for both sides, and this issue is the focus of this paper.

Labour organisations are uneasy with the anti-globalist agenda as it challenges the ‘rules of the game’ for unions and the ways in which they have traditionally defined themselves and the boundaries of solidarity. Collective identities and interest representation have been shaped by, and institutionalised, throughout capitalist development, and this has been exacerbated in the context of labour corporatism. Although a contrary proposition, trade unions are a by-product of capitalism. The new generation militancy does not seem to be able to carry much weight without the support and organisation of the old forces of labour unions. However, the anti-globalisation movement may provide new “repertoires of contention” (Tilly, 2006) that could potentially contribute to rekindling trade unions within the broader civil society and constitute a platform for revitalised labour politics (Baccaro *et al.*, 2003), in line with the universalist tenets of the early days of labour internationalism.

To address these issues, we will first critically examine trade union strategies and then turn to the anti-globalisation movement in order to identify the ways in which these challenge organised labour but also provide avenues for revitalisation. The paper outlines campaigns and political stance towards global labour issues and governance of the newly formed International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), but focuses on the European Confederation of Trade Unions (ETUC). The ETUC is an interesting case example as it epitomises a corporatist response to globalisation adrift from social movements.

Shifts in Union Strategies amid Global Restructuring: Towards Revitalisation?

Times are hard for trade unions. That they are losing ground cannot be denied, and it is a process that has been going on for some time. We shall therefore not linger over the arguments explaining the erosion of collective representation, they are now quite familiar. Instead, it should not be forgotten that for something like a quarter of a century trade unions have been faced with a concerted neoliberal offensive – as emblematically expressed by the ‘Washington consensus’. Nor is this offensive limited to besieging the trade unions on the economic and institutional fronts, for, like a saline solution, it permeates all social relations, performing the insidious task – as Gramsci accurately predicted – of invalidating the conception and realisation of alternatives. Accordingly, and rather than questioning trade unions potency, the analysis would be better redirected towards capitalism as we know it today. This, moreover, is precisely the starting point of the anti-globalisation critics.

It is best to focus first on trade union actions and their consequences, and then examine, in the light of this analysis, the fields of action that remain open to them. Apart from a few exceptional cases, like South Korea and South Africa, where trade unionism has undergone a recomposition following a class shift, or like Brazil or France, where labour is holding on a long lasting tradition of social movement unionism, unions have devised strategic responses – if we may be forgiven for caricaturing the situation – either *from above*, by means of social partnership for the purposes of institutional consolidation¹, or *from below*, by organising efforts designed to improve their membership both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The former approach represents the archetype in the continental European context; the second is found much more in the English-speaking countries, as a product of cross-dissemination and frequently, for want of an alternative, in adverse institutional contexts. Each approach has its virtues, whether it be a question of maintaining the status of being granted a consultative role, or of renewing trade union identities; and both have met with some degree of success.

¹ Including mergers at national level and global level designed to rationalise resources and fulfil better servicing strategies.

But it is not so much the question of the relevance or the success of such strategies that interests us here as the nature of their unintended consequences and therefore – to put the question the other way round – of the unexploited and putative avenues that lie open for unions to explore. The underlying argument, which we shall explore in more detail below, is that the existing union strategies are fraught with problems at the basic levels of solidarity, democracy and politics. These, in turn, have an impact on the internationalism of the trade union movement and its mobilising capacity.

The partnership strategies entail a number of pitfalls: a) they encourage a retreat into corporatist and sometimes micro-corporatist tactics at the industry level; b) they exacerbate social divisions by reinforcing patterns of inclusion which, as stressed by Hyman (1999), are also, on the societal scale, the frontiers of exclusion; c) they set up competition, on the international scale, between national systems of solidarity (Streeck, 1998). They also entail the disadvantage of confining trade unionism to the role of ‘social management’ and distance it from its rank-and-file membership. This has an even greater demobilising effect in that the partnerships at work have more often than not been trapped into patterns of concessions, resulting in the alienation of the activist grassroots movement. In the final analysis, trade unionism – and this is even more true of the international trade union bodies (Hyman, 2005) – has been imprisoned in an institutional role from which it derives its *raison d’être*. When it thus allows itself to be limited to the logic of the other side (employability, competitiveness, etc.) and when it is caught up in its own self-fulfilling bureaucratic agenda, it surely has little option other than to say ‘yes’ because, having forfeited its own capacity to mobilise, it can no longer establish a balance of power because it suffers from a basic anaemia in the realm of political exchange.

Although organising strategies require considerable trade union resources in a context of employer hostility and legal restrictions, they do have the advantage of replenishing unions’ supply of oxygen emanating from the grassroots. The democratic challenge is in this case to ensure that activism on the local scale is able to find an echo and support at higher levels of the trade union structure. This is not as easy as might be suggested, as it has been argued in the American experience for example that the American peak labour organisation, the Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), seemed to have some trouble in containing the social bonfires lit by local trade unions (Moody, 1997), further leading new generation trade unions, namely the Union of Needle-trades, Industrial and Textile Employees & Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees

International Union (UNITE-HERE) and the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), to split from the AFL-CIO.

The fundamental problem here lies in the fact that collective identities are built up in – sometimes strict – accordance with an interest-based rationale, resulting in a patchwork of solidarities that represent a form of collective egoism answering to centripetal rationales. A corollary of this situation is that organising drives, resolutely pragmatic and not without a dose of mercantilism, fail to address the political dimension; it is a question of “organising without doctrine”, as deplored by Buchanan (2001) in relation to the Australian context. In such situations it is difficult moreover to construct international solidarities, except within the limits of industry or sectoral alliances in industries or sectors already endowed with such a tradition in this respect and a structure for doing so.

What then can be learned from the foregoing analysis? First of all, it appears that these strategies – whatever their intentions may be – lead to hierarchies and fragmentation of solidarities. In so doing, they cause people to forget the value of the very ‘principle of the principle’ as it has been eloquently expressed by Paz (1992), namely, solidarity or fraternity as the primary and indivisible value. And it is thus a question of extricating solidarity from the rationales of self-interest on which collective identities are founded. Secondly, the structures of representative democracy are suffering from an inherent problem of lack of elasticity and responsiveness to the bases and this problem increases the more the decision-making centres are moved away, or become international, and leaderships are disconnected from rank-and-file activism. Finally, not only is there a loss of political alternatives, in the sense of the development of an autonomous ideological space, but the field of the ‘political’, with its vocations of evocation, passion and emancipation, is left untilled. This is accentuated by the course of social-democratic parties, which have sailed out to sea via a ‘third way’, thus causing them to lose track of popular feeling and, at least from the standpoint of activists, making them of little practical use².

² An IG Metall spokesperson at the trade union forum of the 2004 London European Social Forum declared that in his view the German working class was “deprived of voice” (...) and that it was up to the trade unions to do something about it. The same on the Italian side: “there is a need to recreate a class political representation and to struggle to become free of the social-democratic status quo” (Confederazione Generale Italiana de Lavoro spokesperson). A British activist said something similar (TUC/Socialist Workers), at the ESF plenary session, complaining about third way policies: “we must not be afraid to be

If this analysis is correct, it is hardly surprising that trade unions have a hard time in gaining a following and promoting their cause. By addressing these problems, the new protest movements, as we shall see in the next sections, provide some interesting answers. Recruitment within these movements has been growing steadily, rallying the new generations of activists who express their indignation, disagreement and protest and inject universalistic, humanist and internationalist values into globalisation.

This is also a viewpoint shared by an increasing number of observers who express, in various ways, the possibility that these movements – counter hegemonic movements *par excellence* insofar as their protest is designed to undermine the capitalist ‘superstructure’ – probably have what it takes to instil into the trade unions the elixir of passion and utopia that seems to have dried up, thereby contributing to a revitalisation of trade union politics. According to the late Bourdieu (2001), the European social movement has as its objective a utopia, which is precisely what the trade unions need for their renewal. According to Hyman (2001), the trade unions need to commit themselves once more to the battle for ideas and retake the ideological initiative by embracing the demands for global justice. According to Waterman (2001), the building of a new trade union international requires utopian motivation, while Panitch (2001) claims that it is a formidable platform for social transformation, assuming that the trade unions get themselves into gear and that, at the same time, the protest movements create a space for trade union strategies.

As mentioned, this link with the anti-globalisation movement – whether the link takes the form of a platform, coalition, merger, assimilation or rejection – still remains an entirely empirical question. But the stakes are clear: it is a question of finding a new alternative politics capable of reviving the social criticism that lost its force in the 1980s (Boltanski and Chapiello, 2005) and of carrying on the struggle. It is a question of refusing to remain bogged down in the rationales of socio-economic partnership, of an “elitist and demobilising” corporatism (Baccaro *et al.*, 2003), and of turning one’s back on the image of a trade unionism that has run out of steam or handed itself over to its adversaries (Fantasia and Voss, 2003). The challenge is to find a way out of a management rationale, to extract the political from the managerial (Benasayag and Sztulwark, 2001) and to espouse the new social movements in order to re-engage with logics of protest and rejection of the status quo. To this end, and so as to avoid being just one movement among

radical any longer, because social democrats have raised the white flag to the market (...) we now have to show that we refuse compromises”.

others, the trade union movement needs to establish itself in a central position among the radicals (Hurd *et al.*, 2003). In other words, the union movement must succeed in reaffirming its core role in the whole gamut of struggles (Harman, 2000).

The Anti-Globalisation Movement in a Nutshell

The remarkable diversity that is such a feature of the anti-globalisation galaxy, a 'movement of movements' as it has often been characterised, makes it particularly difficult to describe. To achieve any meaningful generalisation it is therefore necessary to view it as a social kaleidoscope for which certain principles drive it and enable it to form coalitions, and through such coalitions, to make the shift from the local to the global.

To start with, as has been pointed out by Klein (2002), if the causes of these movements are multiple, if there are a large number of 'yesses', there is only one 'no', namely the rejection of neoliberalism. In classic sociological terms, the federation of identities is built up around an opposition, for which there is a struggle to control a totality, namely, globalisation. Or to borrow the expression of an activist at the European Social Forum (ESF) held in Paris 2003: "there is a need for a synergy of commitments to be engaged on a wide-ranging front, in the face of neoliberalism which is a totalitarian force engaged on a single front".

The central challenge is the struggle for a restoration and reappropriation of the political. Most of the anti-globalisation movements also call for a horizontal levelling of democratic power, in other words for 'globalisation from below'. This explains, quite coherently, the evident preference for anti-oligarchic and voluntaristic modes of operation and rallying, and the rejection of any monopoly on representation. Accordingly, it is less a crisis of democracy than a determination to achieve deeper democracy.

This mistrust of representative democracy, already evident in earlier social movements, clearly poses problems for trade unions. Nor is this surprising when it is observed that the type of protest against the status quo that emerged in Europe around the early 1990s has its origins in social exclusion fuelling the *Lumpenproletariat*. The movement of the unemployed and the European marches are prototypical examples. In other words, it is a case of social forces seeking to reclaim society from the very social institutions of which trade unions are a part!

This accounts for the fact that the protest movements enjoy particular support among the ranks of youth³. This is the post-baby-boom generation that is the hardest hit by the practices of 'flexploitation' and contingent employment which, when taken together, alienate the present and confiscate the future. This is also the basis of a certain return to materialism (Callinicos, 2003), in terms of both the explanation and questioning of capitalist structures and of the claims for a right to life and dignity.

But, as early socialists were aware, materialism does not preclude idealism. The imperative of citizen participation is transcended by a radical humanism. In referring to the common value of social justice, this humanist impetus explains both the particularistic nature (housing, ecology, defence of the public sphere, human rights, workers' rights, etc.) and the universal nature of the struggles.

'Another world is possible!' is a recurrent slogan that evokes the movement's emancipatory vocation. The attraction of anti-globalisation lies not only in the social critique but also in the large-scale maieutic method for bringing alternatives to the fore. First, in addition to exposing the devastating effects of unbridled neoliberalism, the anti-globalist critique takes on the neoliberal received wisdom of the '*pensée unique*' (one way thinking) – that there is no alternative. This critique comes out against the ideology of a ubiquitous market, the dissolution of human relations by the force of trade, and the reduction of mankind to a logic of self-interest. Second, the originality is that the search for alternatives takes place not *in spite of* but *thanks to* the absence of a model (Benasayag and Sztulwark, 2001), which is a powerful factor of integration. This may also be seen as a shared suspicion of totalising ideologies, hence the recourse to utopia and, in the words of a Spanish activist, to local initiatives such as a "*socialismo al pequeño*" (ESF 2003).

All in all, the new protest movements are thus seeking to create "the social conditions of a collective production of realistic utopias" (Bourdieu, 2001: 40), of which the two constitutive aspects are the rejection of liberal hegemony and the promotion of democracy (Vakalousis *et al.*, 2003).

³ Not that young people have been duped: "the competition between the generations is orchestrated by the employers" (young Belgian activist, ESF 2003); "young people are used to lower wages among the working class and regarded as social dumpers" (young Dutch activist, ESF 2003).

The Labour Problem in the Mirror of Anti-Globalisation: A Heuristic Framework

In what ways therefore, at a general level, do the new alternative protest movements challenge the trade unions and offer some elements of a strategic response? It may be argued that they have an impact on four levels (see Figure 1).

- First of all, in the rejections of rules and ringleaders: protest, rather than regulation, is the name of the game, together with a demand for the return of democracy.
- More precisely, rather than worrying about the power of the institutions, it is a matter of exercising a balance of power that can enable a (re)institutionalisation of the power of the people.
- Next, as stressed above, by a revitalisation of social criticism.
- Finally, by a broadening of the social bases and claims linked up with a renewal of modes of organisation, coordination and collective action.

Labour problem	Anti-globalisation operating principles
Hierarchy of solidarity (labour chauvinism)	The questioning of governance, from institutional (corporatist) regulation to social protest
Lack of political alternative	The revitalisation of politics bringing utopia and humanism back on to the agenda
Elasticity of representative democracy	The reconsideration of democratic participation, the importance of a horizontal levelling of power and networking
Declining mobilising capacity	The renewal of social activism with new constituencies and methods of action, coordination and leadership

Figure 1: The labour problem as reflected by the anti-globalisation movements

Each of these levels, as we shall detail below, may be seen as a fault line offering a particular challenge to trade unions. Beforehand, it should be stressed, lest there be any misunderstanding, that, far from being homogenous, the anti-globalisation groups do not necessarily all adhere, to the letter, to the values and practices that this representation attributes to them; just as it also true of trade unionisms. These are just some dominant

features, which are opposed here for the purpose of framing the argument. It is nonetheless interesting to note that an empirical examination of the intersections between trade unionism and protest movements, according to an in-depth empirical study from the European University Institute, led to a similar set of characteristics: 1) a return to protest, including forms of protest outside factories; 2) rank-and-file union networks; and 3) discourses of identity building and solidarity (della Porta, 2004: 18).

First fault line: passion and utopia, protest rather than regulation

We have already stressed the importance of the discursive capacity of the anti-globalisation movement and its genuinely counter-hegemonic character. It is necessary to look no further than the Charter of the Porto Alegre WSF to become convinced of this. Yet if there is global unanimity on the principle of the matter, this does not mean that there is a consensus on the actions to be taken. Indeed, the protest movement, in what is actually rather a traditional mode, is divided between reformers and revolutionaries, and this has an impact on its relationship to the trade union movement, particularly as regards the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist factions. The critique of these latter is ever more incisively radical: “your wage-earners’ dreams are our nightmares” was a slogan to be seen recently on the walls in Brussels. It is also a matter of the “artists’ malaise” (Sommier, 2005: 42), insofar as the critique is existential in its nature, expressing a feeling of oppression and the rejection of growing social control. As the famous author of *Les Misérables*, Hugo, put it in a different age: revolutionary awareness is moral awareness.

The essential point is that the discursive arsenal put in place pits itself against the ‘naturalisation’ of capitalism, just as the liberal ethos at its origins set out to emancipate humankind from the divine order presented as a ‘natural’ order, in order to arrive at the notion of nation. This historical slant is interesting because in rather precipitate fashion, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, nations have turned into markets and the market has, in a certain manner, come to be imposed as a new natural order. And here is civil society once again rising up to demand its emancipation and a new citizenship.

This is why the protest is directed symbolically against the institutions that are the promoters of liberal capitalism (World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, G8), an emphasis which can have the effect of placing the trade unions in a somewhat unnatural position. International

labour is present at both Davos and Porto Alegre, and has been struggling for involvement in the high seats of economic power⁴ while building a *rapprochement* with civil society which contests these seats of power, frequently even in the mode of a subordinated ally⁵. Nor is the question unequivocal, because who would benefit – it may well be asked – if trade unions were to stand back from the game, at the very juncture, what is more, where a clear offensive is afoot on the national scale, as in Australia under the former liberal regime, or on the international scale, via the processes of regional integration – North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the EU Constitutional Treaty – to change the meta-rules of the game in favour of capital. Or yet again, as a representative of the Canadian Labour Congress confessed: “it’s all very well to complain about the market, but it’s with the employers that we have to bargain”.

Second fault line: a position in favour of democracy that is participative rather than representative or exercised by delegation

A singular feature of the anti-globalisation groups is their concern for a horizontal levelling of power. This orientation has a number of sources in the anarchist tradition: the prevalence of networking arrangements, an organisation by affinity groups, the influence of – or reaction against – consumer society which poses ‘choice’ as the reference for freedom, and a defiance of monopolies of representation. This democratic demand is undoubtedly a heavy constraint in terms of decision-making, coordination and collective direction, but freedom of expression and confrontation, like the freedom to disagree, step down and self-organise, are frequently conceived of as fundamental values. It is also interesting to observe that when they become prevalent they give rise to the emergence of a leadership that often is in its majority female.

In so doing, these groups experiment with, and in some cases invent, participatory models from which the trade unions of the new generation could take their inspiration. They do exist: Respect in England, or, emblematically the trade union *Solidaire Unitaire et Démocratique* in

⁴ “Formal structures for consultation with the international labour movement and the business community should be established in international institutions such as the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF” (ICFTU 24/02/04: World Commission demand for fairer globalisation gets full support of the ICFTU).

⁵ “Today the pressure for change makes the status quo untenable and NGOs provide a catalyst for our action to ensure workers’ rights are enforced at a global scale” (ICFTU, 4th WSF in Bombay, 20/01/04).

France, which was founded on precepts of participatory democracy and which operates in the form of cells and networks.

However, the problem inherent in this 'collective of collectives' is that it has no institutionalised form of speech or process for fixing such speech and this would seem to constitute the reality test on the immediate horizon of the anti-globalisation movement. The creation of a balance of power requires a transition to the political realm which itself entails the need to draw up a programme and hence achieve a unified stance. Such was the repeated realisation of the London ESF 2004. The anti-globalisation movement has thus arrived at the crucial point where it has to face up to the plurality that is its hallmark and invent its own means of integration to become an 'actor'. Otherwise, it runs the risk of behaving like a spinning top. In terms of its relationship with the trade union movement, one may well wonder about the possibility of adapting the pluralism of the social movements to trade union pluralism, knowing that while they collide with one another on the political chessboard, their rank-and-file activists are often the same people.

What is more, it cannot be taken for granted that the protest movements will be so ready to accept trade union leadership; this requires an effort of mutual apprenticeship and taming (Aguiton 2001). Doubts along these lines have been expressed by persons close to the movement. Aguiton, commenting on the mobilisation against the Evian G8, expresses some apprehension concerning the way in which the movement's extension to trade unionism has "a dissolving effect" (Attac 03/05). Negri (2003), for his part, concludes with deep pessimism as to the possibility, if not the usefulness, of building bridges with the trade unions.

Third fault line: for a more organic and inclusive organisation, a broader rather than corporatist and compartmentalised representation

The organic and inclusive character of the anti-globalisation groups rests on a minimum of three pillars.

The first pillar concerns the creation of groups and their mobilisation is more likely to be attributable to shared values rather than common interests. Regarded in this way, solidarity is not a means, a lever, for action, but its foundation stone, a value that is pre-existing and adhered to for its own sake. It is here that the humanist values that inspire common indignation play a prominent role in that they enable the rationales of self-interest to be transcended. Meanwhile, however, a trade union Eurocrat, speaking at the London ESF held on the Trade Union Congress (TUC) premises (panel on

Workers, trade unions, social movements and political representatives) retorted that nothing concrete or lasting can be built on values and that history has shown us that it is better to trust selfish interests. This may well be the case but the problem is its lack of gut conviction.

The second pillar is that activist agendas are defined within a spectrum that includes both a local or neighbourhood framework and a global framework. Nor do the agendas leave out the world of work, since they show deep concern for the fundamental rights of workers (as defined by the International Labour Organisation) and display considerable daring, like the *Reclaim Flexibility!* Campaign of the European anti-capitalists – a campaign conducted in a culture-jam style that appeals to young people, for it should not be forgotten that two-thirds of the European workers whose jobs can be classified as ‘disposable’ are under 30.

The third pillar is the affinity-based model (Dupuis-Déri, 2003). These are variable-geometry organisations that come together or converge depending on the cause, where commitment is voluntary, sometimes off-the-cuff, frequently multi-faceted, and where there is no need to prove one’s identity. There is no levelling down process. On the contrary, this is a blend of micro-cultures, highly colourful, sometimes highly conspicuous and sometimes conflict-ridden, but which make diversity the norm. Respect for and taking account of diversity engenders, against all expectations, strong channels of convergence. For purposes of this analysis at least, it means that globalisation, a phenomenon that until recently was essentially transitive (everything was done *in the cause of* or *on account of* globalisation) becomes inhabited and the inhabitants, inevitably, are highly diversified. The important point is that diversity does not turn into a frontier. If learning diversity were to become a constituting principle, this would represent a case of inverted logic meriting closer scrutiny.

Fourth fault line: from modes of direct action, emotion, celebration and performance in opposition to administered struggles and ritualised conflict

It is clear that the new protest movements have a definite taste for direct action, one-off spontaneous events, and surprise happenings, in which activism can express its radical and creative bent. This aspect no doubt also bears witness to militants’ desire to reappropriate their own lives, to make a secure bid for emancipation, in other words to live and experience a sense of militant activity. In this respect, it is quite fascinating to observe how many activists set themselves up to perform, and to have themselves photographed and filmed, as if to satisfy a conviction that they really were

there, making history, like actors in a reality show. No doubt they have understood that the conquest of the media and the symbolic realm constitutes a privileged activist target, and that undermining the media constitutes an essential – and lower-cost – strategic means of giving body and visibility to their struggles. This no doubt explains the recourse to performance and also, since it is the generation of the image and the mirror (Debord, 1967), the fact that the protesters are themselves highly sensitive to these effects.

Radical behaviour and direct action, it must be said, are far from new phenomena. In the history of social movements and trade unionism, they have invariably been a regular feature. But in the end, rather than asking whether activism has discovered new modes of collective action, it is important to see how it can reinvent itself through this means. This return to theatrical and targeted direct action is not confined to the anti-globalisation groups and permeates new generation trade unions. This displays – to say the very least – a departure from the range of collar-and-tie trade unionism and a return to that of a ‘popular’ trade unionism, in both meanings of the term: away from a technocratic towards a rebellious and often celebratory register, in particular in the mass gatherings.

The local and head-on focus of struggles, like the insurrectional staged events, their effect multiplied in echoing chambers by – frequently international – coordination, takes on a vital function in the sense that it is an approach that allows, objectively, for acts of resistance and small victories, just as, subjectively, such behaviour gives rise to a sense of ‘resistance’, which is regarded as a great victory in itself. It is indeed a common impression that the current forms of protest, with their myriad forms of effervescence, serve more to convince the anti-globalisation movement of its own existence, and to promote the cause of self-fulfilment, rather than carrying any real weight: “transnational activism does not resemble a swelling tide of history but is more like a series of waves that lap on an international beach, retreating repeatedly into domestic seas but leaving incremental changes on the shore” (Tarrow, 2005: 218).

Empirical Vignette: The European Labour Ambivalence Towards Protest Movements

At the ETUC Congress in Prague in May 2003, union leaders were deploring that globalisation was gathering pace in a democratic vacuum. But while calling for greater institutional integration of the world’s governing bodies, no mention was made whatsoever of the new social movements that have

been at the centre of public attention since the late 1990s and which, from Genoa to Edinburgh, have emphatically rejected the democratic legitimacy of such governing bodies. In October 2004, activists at the ESF were considering the need to become a fully-fledged political actor, given their lack of appropriate institutional levers – be they social democratic parties or the trade unions, both of whom were no doubt present somewhere in the shadows of this event. In the meantime, for the ETUC, it was clear stated that the anti-globalisation question did not, in its view, constitute a ‘central’ issue. The other way around, on return from Porto Alegre, its delegation came to the conclusion that there was no better option for the anti-globalisation movement than to move towards the European corporatist model (Jacobi, 2002). And at the Euro demonstration against the Bolkestein Directive organised in Brussels in March 2005, while the union leadership at the head of the procession carried slogans of ‘yes’ to social Europe, the tail of the procession was made up of thousands of activists, shouting ‘no’ to the European Constitution and ‘no’ to an anti-social Europe.

Of course, the links between trade unionism and anti-globalisation are more subtle and quite real. One need only think of the active participation of trade unions and trade unionists, frequently in a personal capacity, in the protest movement (della Porta, 2004). Of course, there are many elements of convergence between the two, in terms of struggles and values. And yet the events enumerated above – and similar examples abound – prompt a belief that the linkage between trade union institutions and the anti-globalisation movement is not something that can, in practice, be taken for granted.

The European context offers a striking example where both are following contrasted trajectories. By jumping on to the bandwagon of social protest, the anti-globalisation movement has been in a phase of ‘social path ascendancy’ while the ETUC might be described as in a situation of ‘institutional path dependency’. These differing trajectories can be explained to a considerable extent in terms of structural predispositions. The ETUC is a “structure before action”, as pointed out by Martin and Ross (1999), with a focus on institution-building rather than mobilisation (Goetschy, 1996). Even so, it is possible to argue that the acceleration and deepening of European integration, especially since the introduction of restrictive economic policies in the run-up to the introduction of the euro, which has been labelled as ‘negative integration’ by critics, has exacerbated the divergence in their trajectories while polarising their respective positions and distance with regard to the European agenda.

As a corporatist body by excellence, the ETUC is accused to get stuck in the idiosyncratic mechanisms of the European techno-structure (Gobin, 1997). Opinions differ but they tend generally to stress its difficulties in breaking with a rationale of technocratic consensus. Although, according to Groux (2004: 46) the ETUC's institutional strategy has enabled it to establish its presence as an important social actor on the European stage – in spite, he admits, of its being so little known – most observers tend to be critical, if not sceptical, as to its capabilities as an actor. First, it has found no way of gaining popular support for the project of a 'social liberal' Europe in which it is ideologically embroiled within a rationale of "comitology" (Hyman, 2004). Secondly, it has no capacity of its own to achieve mobilisation of the people. The troops required for Euro demos are recruited by national trade unions and civil society. The case of the 'No Vox' European collective is a good example. This is a collective of the unemployed and excluded which, as its name suggests, seems to have gained no hearing in the European trade union movement and for which, ironically, the Europeanisation of solidarity does not seem to have represented a stumbling block. Finally, The ETUC's negotiating capacity is caught up in and hemmed in by the European social dialogue, which is employed to occlude the matter of social conflict.

Some attempts have been made towards forging a trade unionism attuned to the concerns of the social movements (Taylor and Mathers, 2004), but without noteworthy impact in relation to the moral economy of the European trade union movement. The situation is indeed becoming somewhat twisted insofar as it may be observed that the trade union activists involved in the protest movements tend to be some of the most critical of European integration (della Porta, 2004)! At best, therefore, as stressed by Braud (2004), the ETUC is today attempting to build bridges towards civil society while at the same time maintaining a safe distance. The trade unions were indeed in evidence at the ESF, but mostly in an arm length attitude not involving any high ranking officials (Bieler and Morton, 2004).

In the final analysis, the ETUC's endorsement of the draft European Constitutional Treaty, which would, it is true, have provided it with an occupation for the next few decades, is a perfect example of its general tendency – radically at odds with the anti-globalisation movement – to go, by and large, with the general flow of EU policy. According to the ETUC declaration, the draft Treaty for a European Constitution represented 'social advances' in which it took pride, even though this position of support met with cries of 'scandalous betrayal' in the activist ranks. At the very same time, the General Assembly of the social movements of the 2004 ESF took the unanimous decision that the European protest movements should converge

to stop the Constitution being adopted, which actually happened later on in France after a joint campaign from trade unions and the organised civil society, rather suggesting a rich potential for political synergies.

This said, the ETUC has recently given signs of change in the steps of the ITUC by providing its formal sponsoring to the *Decent Work for a Decent Life* global campaign, launched at the 2007 WSF in Nairobi, in alliance with social groups such as Social Alert and Solidar. The extent to which this is lip service to the cause or mere ideological window dressing is to be seen. The extent to which such openness will concretely translate back into the EU agenda also needs to be followed with scrutiny, especially in the context of the ongoing Eastern EU enlargement that may trigger divisions on labour positions towards globalisation.

Acting Together for Another World

Act Together for Another World: A World Without Free Trade Agreement, Poverty, War & Discrimination was the rallying slogan of South Korean labour organisations in early 2008. This campaign echoes the ITUC and trade union partners call for 'decent work', including activities around the world in cooperation with "progressive civil society allies", in the words of the ITUC⁶. This may be interpreted as a sign of organised labour leaning towards the anti- globalisation agenda. Indeed, over the last few years, international labour organisations have noticeably hardened their stance towards globalisation, at least in the realm of discourse: "At a time when billions of people are being left behind by corporate globalisation and with the view that leading institutions lack democratic governance (...) the illusion that an unregulated global market economy will provide a better life for all (...) today stands discredited"⁷; "Governments have got it badly wrong and are showing dangerous complacency even as the obvious cracks in the world economy are widening" (ITUC General Secretary Guy Ryder) (...) "The 'golden era' of globalization has made a lucky circle very rich indeed, but most people are missing out on the benefits" (Philip Jennings, General Secretary of UNI Global Union)⁸. This is also reflected in the labour leaders' statement to the annual WEF, 2007, condemning both the 'financialisation'

⁶ ITUC Joins World Social Forum Action Day, calls for support for World Day for Decent Work on 7 October - ITUC Online 015/260108.

⁷ Trade Union Statement to the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum, 01/03.

⁸ Davos: Dangerous Complacency over Global Economy, ITUC Online 014/250108.

and 'short-termism' of new capitalism and the lack and multi-lateral governance for sustainability and accountability⁹.

Such an orientation is perhaps more prevalent since the restructuring of international labour, of which Global Unions and the newly born ITUC, October 2006, under the leadership of the former International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) are leading examples. This indeed is congruent with calls from prominent experts of this field of inquiry who, on both sides of the Atlantic, are urging for a revitalisation of labour politics. Turner sees the activation of a social movement by and within the trade unions as the precondition for a democratic counterweight in an environment that is hostile in all respects: "ongoing global liberalisation has weighted the odds heavily against organizing, bargaining and legislative success, unless such efforts are part of rank-and-file based mobilizations that attract broad social support in campaigns framed as battles for social justice" (Turner, 2005: 21). Hyman argues that unions have to "win back their legitimacy" (Hyman, 2007: 207), and a major way of achieving this is by defining "alternative ways of connecting economy and society, work and life" (...) they need a "new vision, even a new utopia if they are to become subjects and not objects of history" (Hyman, 2007: 208).

If this is to happen, however, it is rather a matter of contingency (Ramsey, 1999; Frege and Kelly, 2003), and whether it will filter through into the labour agenda, across the fault lines. Hyman, in a fundamental essay (Hyman, 1999), asked this question: can solidarity resist globalisation? For the labour movement to answer this question, much depends on whether in-built solidarity, institutionalised and internationalised solidarity in the wake of a globalising capitalism, can champion global solidarities. Or, to put it another way, can globalisation resist solidarity?

REFERENCES

Aguiton, C. (2001). *Le monde nous appartient*. Plon.

Baccaro, L., Hamann, K., & Turner, L. (2003). The Politics of Labour Movement Revitalization: The Need for a Revitalized Perspective. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 9 (1), 119-133.

Benasayag, M., & Sztulwark, D. (2001). *Du contre-pouvoir*. Paris: La découverte.

⁹ http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/WEF_Statement_-_Labour_and_the_Shifting_Power_Equation_-_Rev_EN.pdf

- Bieler, A., & Morton, A. D. (2004). Another Europe is Possible? Labour and Social Movements at the European Social Forum. *Globalisations*, 1(2), 305-327.
- Boltanski, L., & Chapiello, E. (2005). The New Spirit of Capitalism. *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 18 (3-4), 161-188.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Contre-Feux 2*. Paris: Raisons d'Agir.
- Braud, M. (2004). Après le congrès de la CES, quelle stratégie et quelles actions syndicales européennes ?. *Chronique Internationale de l'IREs*, 86, 43-52.
- Buchanan, J. (2001). New Directions in Union Strategy: Organising for fairness and reduced inequality at work. Sydney: *Australasian Organising Conference*.
- Callinicos, A. (2003). *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*. Polity Press.
- Clerc, D. (2005). Les théoriciens du capitalisme. *Alternatives Economiques*, 65, 18-22.
- della Porta, D. (2004). The unions, the movements, Europe, and democracy. Some evidences from the first European Social Forum. In *Organised Labour - An Agent of EU Democracy? Trade Union Strategies and the EU Integration Process*, European Conference, University College of Dublin.
- Debord, G. (1967). *La société du spectacle*. Paris: Éditions Champs Libres.
- Dupuis-Déri, F. (2003). Manifestations altermondialisation et groupes d'affinité. Anarchisme et psychologie des foules rationnelles. In *Les Manifestations Altermondialistes*, Montréal, December.
- Fantasia, R., & Voss, K. (2003). *Des syndicats domestiqués - Répression patronale et résistance syndicale aux Etats-Unis*. Paris: Raisons d'Agir.
- Frege, C. M., & Kelly, J. (2003). Union Revitalization Strategies in Comparative Perspective. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 9 (1), 7-24.
- Gobin, C. (1997). *L'Europe syndicale: entre désir et réalité*. Bruxelles: Labor.
- Goetschy, J. (1996). The European Trade Union Confederation and the Construction of European Trade Unionism. In P. Leisink, J. van Leemputand & J. Vilrocx (eds.), *The Challenges of Trade Unions in Europe* (pp. 253-265). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Groux, G. (2004). La montée en puissance d'un acteur social européen. *Alternatives internationales*, 2, 46-47.
- Harman, C. (2000). Anti-capitalism: theory and practice. *International Socialism*, Autumn, 33-59.
- Hurd, R., Milkman, R., & Turner, L. (2003). Reviving the American Labour Movement: Institutions and Mobilization. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 9 (1), 99-117.
- Hyman, R. (1999). Imagined Solidarities: Can Trade Unions Resist Globalization?. In P. Leisink (ed.), *Globalization and Labour Relations* (pp. 94-115). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

- Hyman, R. (2001). European Integration and Industrial Relations: A case of Variable Geometry?. In P. Waterman & J. Wills (eds.), *Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms* (pp. 164–179). Blackwell Publishers.
- Hyman, R. (2004). Trade Unions and the Politics of the European Social Model. In *Organised Labour – An Agent of EU Democracy? Trade Union Strategies and the EU Integration Process*, European Conference, University College of Dublin.
- Hyman, R. (2005). Shifting Dynamics in International Trade Unionism: Agitation, Organisation, Bureaucracy, Diplomacy. *Labor History*, 46 (2), 137–154.
- Hyman, R. (2007). How can trade unions act strategically?. *Transfer – European Review of Labour and Research*, 13 (2), 193–210.
- Jacobi, O. (2002). In search of concepts – the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, 25–30 January 2002. *Transfer – European Review of Labour and Research*, 8 (1), 164–168.
- Klein, N. (2002). Farewell to ‘The End of History’: Organization and Vision in Anti-Corporate Movements. *Socialist Register – A World of Contradictions*, Merlin Press, 1–14.
- Martin, A., & Ross, G. (1999). *The Brave New World of European Labor*. New York: Berghahn.
- Moody, K. (1997). *Workers in a lean world: unions in the international economy*. New York: Verso.
- Negri, T. (2003). Introduction. In W. F. Fisher and T. Ponniah (eds.), *Another World is Possible: Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum*. London: Zed Books.
- Panitch, L. (2001). Reflections on Strategy for Labour. *Socialist Register*, Merlin Press, 367–392.
- Paz, O. (1992). *L'autre voix. Poésie et fin de siècle*. Arcades: Gallimard.
- Ramsay, H. (1999). In Search of International Union Theory. In J. Waddington (ed.), *Globalization and Patterns of Labour Resistance* (pp. 192–219). London: Mansell.
- Sommier, I. (2005). La contestation du capitalisme. *Alternatives Economiques*, 65, 42–43.
- Streeck, W. (1998). The Internationalization of Industrial Relations in Europe: Prospects and Problems. *Politics and Society*, 26, 429–459.
- Tarrow, S. (2005). *The New Transnational Activism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, G., & Mathers A. (2004). The European Trade Union Confederation at the Crossroads of Change? Traversing the Variable Geometry of European Trade Unionism. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 10 (3), 267–285.
- Tilly, C. (2006). *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Turner, L. (2005). From Transformation to Revitalisation: A New Research Agenda for a Contested Global Economy. *Work and Occupations*, 32 (4), 383–399.

Vakalousis, M., Vincent, J. M., & Zarka, P. (2003). *Vers un nouvel anticapitalisme – Pour une politique d'émancipation*. Paris: Éditions du Félin.

Waterman, P. (2001). Trade Union Internationalism in the Age of Seattle. In P. Waterman & J. Wills (eds.), *Place, Space and the New Labour Internationalisms* (pp. 8-32). Blackwell Publishers.