

Notes and proposals • Lille 2001

**Labour College of the Alliance for a
responsible, plural and social world**

The trade union movement at the dawn of the 21st Century

The Labour College of the Alliance for a responsible, plural and social world brings together trade unionists and other activists on five continents, in an exchange of information and experiences across sectors and region. We try to identify strategies and tactics which can modernise and improve our movement's response to the challenge of globalisation, precarious working conditions, and the communication difficulties which can arise between trade unionists and members of other social movements working for a better world.

This short text presents the College's main proposals for a new strategy for the labour movement.

This is work-in-progress, and we welcome your comments and participation. You can consult our full proposals, including the interactive version of this dossier, at our web site:

www.forum-alternatives.net



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Summary

Responding to neo-liberalism

The individualisation and compartmentalisation of work, and the growth in subcontracting by the larger public and private employers has increased the gap between a core of unionised workers and a mass of unprotected and un-unionised working people. It will take much more than calls to unionise the un-unionised to overcome this division, and re-establish the universal vocation of the unions as defenders of the interests of working people.

In particular, we must resist the general offensive against workers' rights, in the workplace, as tenants and consumers, as women, as citizens... in other words; we must recognise the multiple identities of our members, and stand with them in their various struggles for a better world. In Latin America, many trade unions are active in campaigns against Structural Adjustment Policies. Further to the north, the US group Jobs With Justice campaigns on crosscutting issues of poverty and rights that affect the working-class majority in that country. Many of these successful campaigns represent a convergence between employed workers and various excluded or marginalized sectors of our societies. We see such convergence at the piqueteros barricades in Argentina, the demonstrations of the Unemployed Graduates movement in Morocco, and the European Marches against Unemployment and Insecurity. Other campaigns have focused on rejecting and renegotiating "orphan" clauses whereby new employees have second-class conditions compared to the unionised 'core'.

Trade unions also need to present in the debate about new forms of misery in the workplace: be it the stress and insecurity of lower and middle managers, or the "training" contracts which all too-often hide unacceptably low wages and conditions. We need to find solutions to the informal sector, child labour and the sex industry, which improve the conditions of the working people involved, while gradually eliminating these extreme forms of exploitation.

We must also find new ways of addressing ourselves to an increasingly diverse working class, and overcome the image that sometimes exists of unions as clubs of older white men of a certain culture. The "Workers Clubs" in many parts of the USA are a positive example in this respect.

Social movements: what convergence?

Trade unionism is often caught in the contradiction between managing day-to-day activities, and needing to intervene in a constantly evolving balance of forces. To advance, we need to find convergence with the various social movements (ecological, immigrant rights, housing, unemployment, anti-globalisation, feminist) that testify to society's irrepressible capacity to resist and revolt.

Convergence with the women's movement requires trade union participation in feminist actions, and the involvement of feminist currents in the elaboration and implementation of labour campaigns on issues of particular relevance to women workers, such as part-time work, the minimum wage and sexual exploitation. The Worldwide Women's March in 2000 was a good example of the difficulties and the successes of this type of convergence. What we need are truly feminist trade unions, with women-only structures wherever our female members think it useful, a fair place for women in leadership positions, and concrete union proposals to help women members deal with their "triple shift" (work, family, activism).

In the global south, trade unions can be an important non-clerical force in women's struggle against macho and religious-inspired laws and traditions. Unions should also support women's struggle against religious fundamentalists: because although the fundamentalists are mainly focused on women's rights, they will surely attack trade unionists when they get the chance.

Convergence with movements for immigrants' rights means more than just trade union support for anti-racist campaigns. Unions need to respond vigorously to the emanations of social insecurity (unemployment, precarious conditions), which encourage racism. Unions need a visible presence in struggles outside the workplace, to counter the "scapegoat" dynamic. The "sans-papier" movement to support undocumented immigrants in France is a good example of this convergence.

Movements on these issues have emerged in many Northern countries in recent years. But links with the labour movement remain difficult, for two reasons. Firstly, the unemployed movements are based in a milieu that faces great existential difficulties and instability, and has difficulty being proactive in a sustained fashion. Secondly, many unions fail to appreciate the need of these organisations to be fully autonomous. But there are also significant differences over strategy. To simplify, unemployment activists stress the need to increase universal social welfare payments, and create some kind of guaranteed minimum income. Trade union activists, on the other hand, generally present a massive reduction in the working week as the preferred solution for reducing unemployment by creating new jobs. We must continue this debate, while everywhere privileging agreement over at least partial measures for which we can struggle together.

From international trade unionism to the globalisation of solidarity

International trade union structures often seem very far from the life and preoccupations of working people. Fortunately, active campaigns to support struggles in other countries often represent an effective way to mobilise and educate anti-globalisation forces. Trade unions need to get involved more in these campaigns, and seek to make them more permanent. The Clean Clothes Campaign is a particularly interesting example. It brings together trade unionists, consumers and feminists North and South, in a campaign to improve the working conditions of the feminised labour force of garment and footwear subcontractors of the major trademarks.

We also need to modernise and co-ordinate trade union activities within each multinational. These companies exploit the lack of international social legislation, and use every loophole of national law. Even in Europe, the multinational-wide works councils are very weak: they lack money, time, information and authority. However, these structures do represent an embryonic form of international labour organisation, and have the potential for articulating labour struggles within a given multinational. It is important to improve information flows, and recognise the importance of information as a weapon in labour disputes. We should also create better links between workers in the production and sales divisions of each multinational; initiate public information campaigns aimed at the consumers of the company; and demand social legislation that will give authority and resources to multinational-wide workers' structures. We must continue to develop labour networks that stretch across linguistic, cultural and political frontiers. We must also strengthen the international sectoral co-ordination of labour, to prevent multinationals from playing workers and governments against each other in a downward spiral of competition.

The labour political project

It is difficult to generalise about the political role of trade unions. However, in many cases, the renovation of our political activity requires a better understanding of the relationship between organised labour and the political left. Unions should not accept domination by political parties, and insist on an equal relationship. We should seek to overcome the division that may exist between unions and parties, by recognising the autonomy of each project, and building common activities and campaigns in a transparent way.

The central axis of labour political intervention should be the advancement of the universal citizens' interests that are of particular interest to our members. In the global north, this includes the search for a new role for the public sector, and for the voluntary/non-profit sector, within a new economic logic. In the global south, unions are intervening in defence of human rights in the workplace, for the application of those aspects of national legislation that protect working people, and for the withdrawal of the army and police from essentially civil conflicts between employers and employees.

0. Introduction: New Challenges for trade unions

The goal of this booklet, and the accompanying website is to nourish exchanges between people involved in social movements; specifically within trade-union organisations struck by the re-planning of production reports.

More specifically, in continuity with the work supported by the Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Man (FPH), our goal is to identify current problems within the labour-union movement and to build an international network to identify proposals and experiences that can take trade unionism into the 21st Century.

Work on this project began in late 2000, with a number of regional union meetings held in Brazil (November 2000), Chile (January 2001), Mexico (February 2001) and in Canada (April 2001). In parallel, we began an on-line discussion and exchange of experiences, with the support of the World Forum of Alternatives and in collaboration with networks of union activists in the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Pacific region.

Our deliberations occur within the context of social remobilisation confronting globalisation of the markets. Davos, Seattle, Prague, Nice, Seoul, Quebec, Dakar, Porto Alegre... the list of demonstrations and counter-summits that have occurred over the past two years is long and well-known. Their common slogan: "Another world is possible" signifies a new generation of social movement activism, in which the trade union movement must find a new role.

For the past 20 years, throughout the world, the situation for workers has been deteriorating. The production ratio has changed sharply (through the introduction of new working norms...) and these changes have privileged worker insecurity (short-term and part time contracts), "under-the counter" and undocumented work, sub-contracting... Neoliberal policies have translated into the State failing to live up to its traditional guarantees (right to work, social protection, social services...). The triumph of neoliberalism resulted in trade unionism entering a crisis and confronting a loss of direction. However, this policy applied from country to country via structural adjustment and "downsizing" programmes has also built the elements needed for a new social convergence. In the following pages, we identify some of the questions trade unionists must ask themselves if they are to understand and engage in this new birth of the global movement for a better world.

1 – The organisation of the workplace: responses to the neo-liberal offensive

Since the industrial revolution, workers have come together in associations and labour unions to obtain better salaries and working conditions. At the dawn of the 21st Century, what challenges lie ahead?

In the global north, we continue to advance towards male-female equality, and the benefits of a higher-skilled workforce. But neo-liberalism threatens to reverse many social benefits in the name of greater flexibility. In the global south, we continue to struggle for democracy, and for national development that increases our country's autonomy within the global system.

In all regions, we face old challenges, such as child labour, the sex trade, and new questions, such as the relationship between jobs and the environment. Rapid economic change, and the fragmented nature of our economies require the reform of trade union structures.

1.1. – Feminising Unionism

The workforce is increasingly female. But women workers have lower pay and worse conditions than their male counterparts.

- The struggle against poverty and for basic rights must have a more female face. The **WorldWide Women's March** has documented the feminised face of poverty, part-time work and second-tier contracts.
- By responding to these issues, unions can reinvent their strategy around universal goals that are of particular importance to the most oppressed sectors of the working population.
- To do this, unions must also reform themselves. This means creating specific women-only structures where women members see the need, positive discrimination to bring more women into positions of authority within the movement, and measures to help women members deal with their triple shift (work, family, activism).

1.2. – Adapting unionism to the new methods of managing workers

Society in the global north is increasingly individualistic, and the workforce increasingly atomised into smaller work units. But new technology is also creating new forms of Fordist control over our work: this is contributing to a proletarianisation of 'middle class' professions, and a whole range of new forms of stress and suffering linked to work pressures. The 'new economy' has compartmentalised many enterprises, with an increased outsourcing and subcontracting that facilitates the repression or denial of workers' rights. Young people are particularly affected, and many younger workers are unconvinced of the utility of trade union membership.

Unions can fight against this – and we can see a number of very inventive ways of working, from the not-exactly-a-union associations of Microsoft employees, or the US and Canadian campaigns to unionise McDonalds restaurants. But success requires more than innovation. Unions must also consistently resist segmentation of the workforce, and refuse 'orphan clauses' which protect a core workforce while allowing employers to offer inferior conditions on new employees.

1.3. – Resisting the general questioning of workers rights

Resisting the neo-liberal offensive requires new tactics.

The emergence of broad, dynamic anti-globalisation movements has recreated the possibilities of mass confrontation tactics: what kind of convergence should unions seek here?

There is also an issue of convergence within the labour movement, particularly in countries with plural (competing?) unions in each sector, differentiated by their political or religious orientation. **The public sector strike in France in December 1995** is rich in lessons on the relative strengths of corporate and interprofessional unions.

In the global south, unions have joined or led broader struggles against Structural Adjustment Programmes (**Argentina, Brazil**) as well as campaigns for women's rights (**Morocco**)

1.4. – Convergences between employed and marginalized or excluded working people

Mass unemployment atomises the working class: those in work fear for their job, those out of work must focus all their energies on short-term, personal solutions. Trade unions are not good at representing the unemployed, but offer a stability and representativity, which unemployed groups often lack.

In Argentina, a wave of road blockages has been the focal point for the convergence of the '**piqueteros**' – an informal coalition of labour and marginalized groups united by their opposition to government policies, structural adjustment, and by their willingness to embrace radical protest tactics.

Since the early 1990s, there has been an exciting convergence between unemployed movements, trade unions and political activists, in coalitions that address all aspects of work and job stability. (AC!, European Marches against Unemployment).

1.5. – Strategies to deal with ‘under the table’ work

The defence of working conditions requires effective action to increase the stability and conditions of those currently trapped in 'black' and informal sectors. Whatever our objections to child labour and the sex trade, we recognise that the solution is a combination of repression of the worst expressions of this extreme oppression, combined with the generalisation of basic rights within these sectors. By levelling up working conditions, we protect all workers, and bring immediate benefits to the weakest.

The **ICFTU** has done extensive research on how this can be achieved in the **maquiladora** plants that line the Mexican-US border. **Jobs With Justice** attacks the same problems within the US economy.

2. Union struggles and democracy

In **South Korea** and a number of other countries, the independence of labour associations is at stake due to repressive legislation. In some countries, the right to unionise is forcibly repressed by semi-legal or illegal means (**see for example the ICFTU file on Colombia**) and, in most countries of the world, activity in a trade union can be a threat to your career. What kind of strategy should unions develop in light of this reality?

More generally, the working environment is deeply hierarchical and anti-democratic. Choices (of technique, of work plan, of teams) are imposed by a minority, for whom knowledge is a form of power, to be hoarded rather than shared. Unions have tended to resist this process by forming a counter-power, which has brought its own problems of hierarchy. In fact, the bureaucratisation of trade unions is one of the main reasons workers give for not joining a union.

The question, then, is what kind of union movement organising can protect workers against arbitrary decisions of managers, and ensure workers' input into decision-making?

2.1. – A free union with a fighting spirit

What strategies help us build truly independent trade unions, which can maintain themselves through difficult times, without losing their ability to fight for their members?

- The **KCTU** in South Korea has maintained itself by radical protest and by taking a leading role in the country's pro-democracy movement
- **Auto workers' unions in Belarus and the Ukraine** have supported political candidates that openly challenge dictatorial rulers. They have also campaigned against corruption and impunity of the new capitalist elite.
- **Transport workers in France (1997), and teachers in the Canadian province of British Columbia** have struggled against legislation (condemned by the **ILO**) that extends the definition of "emergency" services and criminalizes their activities.
- Unions everywhere strive to maintain the means for financial independence: fees, grants and a strike fund. But the growth in non-membership income (such as management of training and social security programmes) can lead to excessive dependence on outside institutions, as Spain's **CC.OO** has discovered.

2.2. – Building international solidarity to oppose union repression

There is no one blueprint for solidarity campaigns. **The Australian dockers strike** resisted because it targeted dockers worldwide to boycott companies that were undermining rights of Australian workers. Other strikes have won because they won support from other sectors in the same country, even where they failed to win support from workers in the same sector in other countries.

Unions have often neglected the link that can be made to human rights groups: though British members of Amnesty International have developed innovative joint campaigns to draw attention to the plight of imprisoned trade unionists. **Amnesty's recent decision to broaden its work to include social rights** creates exciting new areas for convergence and collaboration

2.3. From the base to the summit: what about union representivity

Negotiation with government and employers involves all kinds of trade-offs between participation, and efficiency. Employers tend to prefer confidential negotiations: unions have

more to gain by involving their members, even if this makes it more difficult for union leaders to convince members to follow the recommended strategy.

Questions of democracy, participation and information-sharing exist also within the unions. There is incredible variation in union practice concerning unity and autonomy, federalism and centralism, homogeneity or the right to form tendencies and currents:

Political dependency and unity at the base: examples from Chile and Mexico

Radical currents within the labour movement have always explored new ways of imposing democracy and participation: strikers at the Polish shipyard strikes in Gdansk in 1980 successfully imposed the broadcasting of negotiations with the Stalinist government over loudspeakers. More recently, transport workers in France used cellular telephones to inform each other of the local conditions in each locality where negotiations were taking place. The Internet is playing an increasingly important role in the horizontal distribution of information within the movement, though trade union leaderships have difficulty accepting the decentralised and participative potential of this new media.

2.4. – Countering the language of neoliberalism

The neoliberal offensive is also inside our heads: concepts of “teamwork,” “participation” have joined “efficiency” as part of a bosses’ rhetoric that involves workers in quality control and innovation without sharing the benefits of their additional labour, and which extends an illusion of participation without a genuine increase in autonomy or ‘stake’ in the enterprise

How then can unions build demands and use negotiating procedures that avoid a result where the “demands” of efficiency and teamwork are used against the employees, or used to de-legitimise workers’ own needs and demands? The debate around **the introduction of the 35 hour week in France** is rich in lessons: the working week was cut, but at the expense of a whole range of measures that in some cases have made work even more insupportable, such as the annual calculation of working time, which leads to manager-determined fluctuations in weekly working time, and an increase in anti-social hours.

We need to find the appropriate language to demands increased controls by workers or tripartite bodies over the application of the right to work: the French labour inspector Gerard Filoche has identified a wide range of areas where labour legislation could be enforced without great difficulty, by workers’ representatives and possibly employers’ federations.

We should also develop our own discourse on contested terms, such as democracy and globalisation. This will also require innovative training tools for activists and for workers (see for example the professional and literacy training strategy of the metallurgy union of the **CUT** in Brazil)

3 – Convergence with other social movements

Unions are, for the most part, stable associations of stable employees. Their very stability involves a range of difficulties: how to manage the contradictions of day-to-day management, such as the need to preserve the union apparatus during periods of weak mobilisation; how to resist the influence on members, staff and leaders of the dominant classes' ideology which prevails in society and has an insidious effect even on movements which seek to counter it; and how to avoid the risks of bureaucratisation that grow in direct proportion to the size and complexity of the organisation?

At the same time as they wrestle with these issues, unions must also understand and relate to the really-existing social struggle, to a balance of forces that is constantly evolving. The progressive camp comprises a wide range of social movements, each of which, like the unions, responds to its own internal dynamics and rhythms. Social movements are the signs of the popular capacity to revolt and resist. They are linked to mass social dynamics, and cover a bewildering range of issues, though the largest and most common movements often respond to issues of ecology, immigration, various forms of "no rights", housing, anti-globalisation, and feminism...). Like the trade union movement, other social movements tend to articulate *demands* rather than propose *alternatives*. (To be exact, the capacity of social movements to articulate alternatives seems to be related to the overall strength of the progressive movement, including left political currents).

A certain Marxist conception of the "leading role of the proletariat" has on many occasions led union activists to falsely assign a hierarchy between their own struggle and supposedly secondary or peripheral struggles. In reality, social struggles have often been carried forward by other social movements, on issues or at moments at which unions are for one reason or another inactive or pro-system. Examples of this would include the re-emergence of indigenous and peasant movements in Latin America, and, in Western Europe, the emergence of the gay rights movement.

The current perspectives for greater convergence between trade unions and social movements are strongly linked to what has been termed the anti-globalisation movement. In other words, it is the anti-globalisation movement that provides the space and discourse within which convergence can take place.

3.1. – Convergence with the women's movement

Convergence with the women's movement requires trade union participation in feminist actions, and the involvement of feminist currents in the elaboration and implementation of labour campaigns on issues of particular relevance to women workers, such as part-time work, the minimum wage and sexual exploitation. The Worldwide Women's March in 2000 was a good example of the difficulties and the successes of this type of convergence. What we need are truly feminist trade unions, with women-only structures wherever our female members think it useful, a fair place for women in leadership positions, and concrete union proposals to help women members deal with their "triple shift" (work, family, activism).

In the global south, trade unions can be an important non-clerical force in women's struggle against macho and religious-inspired laws and traditions. Unions should also support women's

struggle against religious fundamentalists: because although the fundamentalists are mainly focused on women's rights, they will surely attack trade unionists when they get the chance.

3.2. – Convergence with movements to defend the rights of immigrants

Convergence with movements for immigrants' rights means more than just trade union support for anti-racist campaigns. Unions need to respond vigorously to the emanations of social insecurity (unemployment, precarious conditions) that encourage racism. Unions need a visible presence in struggles outside the workplace, to counter the "scapegoat" dynamic. Trade union support in France and Spain for the "sans-papier" movement of and on behalf of undocumented immigrants is a good example of this convergence.

3.3 – Convergence with environmental movements

There is an irreconcilable contradiction between the 'productivism' that dominates large sections of the union movement and those 'deep ecology' currents that does not take workers' needs into account. However, most trade unionists and most ecologists share progressive values that can be developed into a mutual commitment to social and environmental progress.

The common objective is to contribute to the consideration of our future, both as citizens and as inhabitants of the planet earth. Groups like the **Terrazul Institute** in Brazil seek to encourage this convergence by enhancing the debate around environmental problems in their economic and political context, and articulating struggles for a dignified life, a healthy future and a new model for humanity that respects the ethnic, cultural biological diversity of every individual and every society. This involves a wide range of environmental educational programs and participate in actions and campaigns in defence of the environment and biodiversity, and in defence of indigenous and other local populations that seek to construct a sustainable society.

3.4 – Convergence with movements of unemployed workers

Movements against mass unemployment have emerged in many Northern countries in recent years (see **AC!, European Marches against Unemployment**). But links with the labour movement remain difficult, for two reasons. Firstly, the unemployed movements are based in a milieu that faces great existential difficulties and instability, and has difficulty being proactive in a sustained fashion. Secondly, many unions fail to appreciate the need of these organisations to be fully autonomous. But there are also significant differences over strategy. To simplify, unemployment activists stress the need to increase universal social welfare payments, and create some kind of guaranteed minimum income. Trade union activists, on the other hand, generally present a massive reduction in the working week as the preferred solution for reducing unemployment by creating new jobs. We must continue this debate, while everywhere privileging agreement over at least partial measures for which we can struggle together.

3.5 – Convergence with the lesbian and gay movements

A range of other “rights” movements have at times shown tremendous mobilising power, and built exciting alliances with the labour movement. The most striking example in Western Europe is perhaps the lesbian and gay movement: currently the social movement with the greatest mobilising power, if we look at the size of street demonstrations. The movement for homosexual equality has won a series of recent successes in making positive reforms in the health, social security, pension and housing regimes, by winning the extension of spousal benefits to same-sex partners.

- The US group **Pride at Work** was founded in 1994 as a national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender labour organisation. Only three years later, the AFL-CIO took a bold step that would have been unthinkable just ten years earlier when its executive council voted unanimously to make Pride At Work an official constituency group.

A **Trade Unions, Homosexuality and Work Conference** was held in as part of the 1998 Gay Games in Amsterdam. More than 200 delegates from 30 countries attended. The closing document called on unions to:

- Address issues surrounding discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender equity at work, formulate equal opportunities policies and assign financial and human resources to actively implement these policies.
- Use conference networks to encourage international trade union confederations, such as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), to improve their actions on sexuality discrimination issues.
- Integrate defending gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender workers' rights into the human rights activities and equity programs of national and international trade union structures. **Britain's Fire Brigades Union (FBU)** has integrated these demands into its anti-harassment at work strategy, which has also served to advance women and ethnic minorities in a previously macho and white sector.
- Develop policies on HIV/AIDS and chronic diseases at the workplace in which the rights of people with HIV and affected workers are protected against dismissal and isolation.

3.6 – Convergence with children’s rights movements

The Indian child workers’ trade union **Bhima Sangha** believes that it is possible to create a world where there is no child labour. But in order to do that, the basic causes of child labour need to be solved. Working children themselves must participate in identifying the problem and identifying solutions and only then are these interventions likely to benefit children both in the long term and short term.

However in the immediate context, children working in intolerable situations need to be provided appropriate alternatives both for themselves and their families. These alternatives should be sustainable. Other working children, working in relatively safe occupations have the right to work in dignity and be provided with tools and skills to change the structures that cause these situations. Education should be seen as a part of the alternatives created, but in doing so, education has to be redesigned to meet the needs of all children.

4 – Trade unions and political change

It is difficult to generalise about the political role of trade unions. However, in many cases, the renovation of our political activity requires a better understanding of the relationship between organised labour and the political left. Unions should not accept domination by political parties, and insist on an equal relationship. We should seek to overcome the division that may exist between unions and parties, by recognising the autonomy of each project, and building common activities and campaigns in a transparent way.

The central axis of labour political intervention should be the advancement of the universal citizens' interests that are of particular interest to our members. In the global north, this includes the search for a new role for the public sector, and for the voluntary/non-profit sector, within a new economic logic. In the global south, unions are intervening in defence of human rights in the workplace, for the application of those aspects of national legislation that protect working people, and for the withdrawal of the army and police from essentially civil conflicts between employers and employees.

4.1 The mirage of co-management

Can working people co-manage the means of production within a capitalist system? The jury is still out on this question.

Across the global north, workers' pension and insurance funds control sizeable resources: about one third of funds on the Canadian stock market are "owned" by working people — but managed by professional fund managers who follow strictly market criteria. Quebec's Solidarity Funds have the explicitly goal of creating or protecting jobs, even at the cost of a reduced return to pension-holders. This is only made possible by the generous tax concessions provided by the provincial government. And, though the fund has certainly created and protected jobs, it has had only a moderate role in promoting other values (ecological, national development, etc).

The expansion of the non-profit sector has dramatically increased the number of workers employed in not-quite-capitalist enterprises, though generally not in the productive sectors of the economy. While these workers may have greater autonomy and job satisfaction compared to the private sector, their low wages and high unpaid overtime must also be taken in to account. The unionisation of the non-profit sector is a very delicate question...

4.2. Rebuilding the public sector based on a different economic logic

Trade unions increasingly recognise that we cannot successfully oppose privatisation unless we base our argument on public need, universal access to public services, and a cost-benefit relationship for the majority of ordinary people. State monopoly is not an end in itself. In other words, we should explore a range of systems of public ownership and control, placing the emphasis on the end result for the citizens.

Some trade unions are optimistic about the growth of the mixed, non-profit and "social market" sectors. Others fear that state support for such programmes is designed to disengage the state from direct responsibility, and to replace unionised full time workers with unorganised workers employed by a mass of small NGOs.

4.3. –The return of the social pact?

Trade unions in some North European countries have negotiated sectoral or national agreements with the state and/or employers, accepting lower wage increases in exchange for promises of job

creation or protection. What is the result of such a strategy? What effect does it have, not only on living conditions, but also on the level and type of union activity, industrial conflict and worker consciousness? And, most of all, can the same model be applied in other regions of the world, particularly in the global south?

4.4. What relationship between unions and left parties

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Case studies of particular interest include:

- The struggle to maintain equality between the unions and the political organisations: be they social democratic (Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand) or Communist (France, Spain, India)
- The relationship between left governments, their party militants and the trade unions that supported their electoral campaign (ANC-SACP-COSATU in South Africa, local PT governments and the CUT in Brazil)
- transparent relations between employee demands and party action: French example of the union –left parties joint project to have a law preventing job cuts in businesses that make a profit.

5 – The Globalisation of Solidarity

Globalisation, is not in and of itself, a new phenomenon. But the recent acceleration is undeniable: rapid development of international commerce, spectacular rise in direct foreign investment, evolution of multi-nationals, deregulating financial markets, and an explosion in the volume of financial transactions. Through international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, and the G8, wealthy countries are organising the installation of free-trade areas that reinforce the process.

Since the 1980s, the application of ultra-liberal policies has translated into massive augmentation of interest rates and has sealed the fate of Southern countries: Structural Adjustment Programmes inevitably impose extreme privatisation, anti-agrarian reform, export stimulation, the abandon of national economic development plans based on domestic capacity and self-sufficiency, reduction of social spending, and abandoning entire elements of the right to work in safety and dignity.

International solidarity is nothing new for trade unions: our experience goes back to the International Workers Association, founded in 1864. Until the end of the cold war, international unionism was structured around three poles: the WTUF (now moribund) that mostly regrouped Stalinist union organisations, the ICFTU, known for a long time for the alliance between European reformist unions and the anti-communist AFL-CIO (USA), and the CMT (Christian unionism). The end of the cold war has removed the fundamental basis of this division, and there is a general trend to union unity, with the most important international structures nowadays being regional groupings like the ORIT (Latin America) or the European TUC, and groupings by sector, such as the various International Secretariats.

Nevertheless, in most cases, these structures do not represent an opposition to neoliberal globalisation, nor are they a place for organising international solidarity, and co-ordinating international resistance. What are the reasons for this? And how can rank and file workers build their own international links?

5.1. Building trans-border solidarity

Even though international unionism seems to be a long way from the day-to-day life of union members, active solidarity during moments of struggle can dramatically change people's consciousness and interests. Noteworthy examples of this trans-border solidarity include:

- The DAWOO struggles in Korea and abroad
- The role of Labour.net and other internet networks in the struggles of British and Australian dockers
- The emergence of information and campaign networks like the Clean Clothes campaign, which link unionists north and south with consumer groups, and other social movements, intervening all along the product chain in defence of the weakest sections of the international workforce.

5.2. Co-ordinating Union action towards the multinationals

Around 45,000 multinationals (controlling 250,000 branches) are responsible for 5% of jobs in the world but 25% of global GNP and a large part of global commercial exchanges.

Union mobilisations within each multinational are hampered by the multiple difficulties of co-ordinating union structures from different nationalities and countries, and resisting the

divide-and-rule tactics of multinationals, who are skilled at pitting workers in one country against their counterparts who work for the same company (or its subcontractors) in another location. Nevertheless, struggles like those of Belgian and French unions against the closing of the Renault plant in Vilvoorde symbolise the ability of union movements to move beyond this division.

European unions have been able to win legal recognition and support of transnational works councils, which give workers' representatives some rights of access to information and consultation within a given multinational at the European Union level. These structures are still very weak, but they may constitute the embryo of a truly international union representing workers of a given multinational.