

## **Mondialisation et travail**

### **Mondialisation, migration et travail : difficultés et perspectives**

**Ronaldo Munck**

#### *Résumé*

*Cet article place les débats actuels sur la migration, le développement et le travail dans le contexte de la mondialisation et de sa contestation. La complexité globale actuelle crée un nouveau terrain de luttes syndicales à l'échelle mondiale au sein duquel la migration est devenue un élément clé de déstabilisation. Les syndicats pourraient adopter le syndicalisme de transformation sociale et reconnaître que les migrants sont des travailleurs, ou prendre un virage xénophobe. Dans les pays du Sud, après bien des décennies d'ajustement structurel, les syndicats sont maintenant considérés comme un acteur politique important. Ils ont l'occasion, étant donné les réactions actuelles à la crise mondiale du capitalisme, de présenter une alternative radicale au statu quo. L'auteur analyse la stratégie officielle actuelle des syndicats, utilisée dans le cadre de la campagne de l'OIT pour un travail décent, et discute des limites de cette campagne. Une alternative est avancée, basée sur les tentatives actuelles d'amplifier les stratégies traditionnelles pour créer un contre-mouvement social.*

## Globalisation and Labour

### Globalization, Migration and Work: Issues and Perspectives

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#### *Abstract*

*This article places current debates around migration, development and work within the context of globalization and its contestation. It is argued that global complexity sets a new terrain for global labour struggles with migration as a key destabilizing element. Trade unions could either embrace social movement unionism and recognize that migrants are workers, or they could take a xenophobic turn. Trade unions in the global South are now seen as a significant political force after many decades of structural adjustment. In current reactions to the global crisis of capitalism, trade unions have an opportunity to present a radical alternative to the status quo. The article examines current official trade union strategy based on the International Labour Organization's campaign for Decent Work along with a discussion of its limitations. An alternative perspective is articulated based on current moves to broaden traditional trade union strategies in an attempt to pose a social counter-movement alternative.*

#### **Introduction**

In 2001, a series of complex inter-related events unfolded across the globe when a small Islamist direct action group sent a number of planes into the symbols of U.S. economic and military dominance. The 'war on terror' started up but then ground to a halt in Iraq, as will also inevitably happen soon enough in Afghanistan. But taking a 'view from the South', what happened was simply the end of U.S. ideological hegemony, similar to the loss of hegemony in the dying days and events of the British Empire. Barely six years later, another crisis of hegemony began to unfold in the U.S., this time detonated by another low-tech event, namely the inability of poor families to pay for house mortgages foisted on them by speculators. From the 'sub-prime

mortgage' crisis in 2007, through to the failures of major banking institutions such as Lehman Brothers, through the stock market collapse of 2008, to the global slow-down/recession/depression of 2009, another capitalist monolith was shaken and its hegemony (though not necessarily dominance) virtually collapsed.

While the global economic situation remains in flux and the outcome of the crisis is clearly uncertain, there is now a general consensus that the economic model prevailing practically uncontested in the 1980s and 1990s has now come to an end. Robert Wade has captured this transitional moment well though the term "financial regime change" (Wade, 2008). Since the major crisis of the 1930s, capitalism can be seen to have embarked on two major policy regimes. The first was Keynesianism which contributed to the longevity of the post-war Bretton Woods arrangement. Its 'embedded liberalism' (Ruggie, 1984) allowed for market allocation of resources but was constrained by the political process which allowed for social need. This model was followed by the neoliberal model in which the 'efficient market hypothesis' (Farmer and Lo, 1999) was considered to be beyond question. This approach provided the rationale for globalization and the extension of the new economic order across the globe, greatly facilitated by the quite sudden collapse of the alternative communist order in 1990. Events since September 2008, however, indicate that this model is itself now exhausted and cannot provide the basis for a sustained recovery from crisis and the underpinnings for a new expanded phase of capital accumulation.

When the financial crisis began to unfold in September 2008, it was widely perceived as a 'Made in USA' phenomenon and it impacted all countries in the South, including, as Joseph Stiglitz reminded us, those that had undertaken 'sound' monetary macroeconomic policies and 'good' financial market regulation (Stiglitz, 2009). There was no pretence that this crisis was the result of 'wrong' economic policies, something that had been repeated constantly when the South's national economic policies were attacked back in the 1980s. The dependent nature of development in the global South was now clear to all (see Bello, 2009; Hausman, 2009; and Choike, 2009 for some critical Southern responses to the crisis) and it drew attention to the long term imbalances in the global economy and the continuing neo-colonial positioning of much of the global South. The call also

went out for a Third-Worldist alternative order in a reprise of the famous Bandung Conference of 1955 which launched the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Whatever the prospects for a Second Bandung in 2010 (see Palat, 2008), it is clear that the South is (re)finding a sense of identity in the course of dealing with the effects of the global crisis. The architecture of the global financial system was fundamentally brought into question. The anger felt in the South was evident in Brazilian President Lula da Silva's rhetorical question: who had ever seen a big banker walking the corridors of power who was black.

Most commentaries about the 2008-2009 global economic crisis was viewed largely through a Northern lens. Certainly it would have some unfortunate side-effects in the South but that was not regarded as the main issue. There was another narrative, however, which somewhat optimistically clung to the hope that the rising economies of the South such as China, India and Brazil would not be too seriously impacted. In reality, the global financial system was always a major source of instability in the South. When the East Asian crisis of 1997 provided a portent of what was going to happen a decade later in the North, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank responded with a call to further open national financial systems and were horrified at any thought of imposing restrictions on capital movements. In a somewhat understated way Robert Wade wrote in 2006 that “[t]here is little evidence to support the proposition that open capital markets generate a more stable and equitable world order; and much to support that they increase volatility and propensity to financial crisis” (Wade, 2006: 11). In fact, it is now quite clear to all sides of the debate that the exact opposite is true.

Much of current mainstream commentary on the South has an air of unreality about it. Commentators claim China and India might slow their pace of economic growth but will continue to act as engines of global recovery and, across the South, the informal sector will act as a safety net for those thrown out of work: “The situation in desperately poor countries isn't as bad as you'd think” declared the former Chief Economist of the IMF (cited in Bremen, 2009: 30). In reality, the situation of the world's poorest has gone from bad to critical. Think simply of the million workers in China's coastal region having to return to an already impoverished rural economy where jobs are non-

existent. The global trends of increased economic inequalities and deepening levels of social exclusion documented in the 1990s (Munck, 2005) are now beginning to accelerate rapidly. The dominant classes fear of the '*classes dangereuses*' during the Industrial Revolution will be magnified many times over as the Globalization Revolution begins to unravel.

### **Global Complexity**

While there are numerous debates around the significance of globalization as a complex, multi-level process, it still remains relatively under-theorized. The global is more or less taken for granted and tends to be conceived of as much more unified than it is, practically as a *deus-ex-machina* descending from the clouds. John Urry (2003) quite rightly directs us to focus much more on the complex character of emerging global relations. Rather than conceive of globalization as a single, unified, unambiguous entity, the complexity approach directs us towards the relationships between structure and process – a system and its environment. In keeping with a much older theory of 'uneven and combined development' (see Van Der Linden, 2007) we need to be much more alert to contradictions in the new world order. In relation to the fluid movement of peoples we call migration, this approach conceives its patterns as "a series of turbulent waves, with a hierarchy of eddies and vortices, with globalism a virus that stimulates resistance, and the migration system a cascade moving away from any state of equilibrium" (Papasiagiadis, cited by Urry, 2003: 62).

Mobility is clearly the keyword, motif and defining characteristic of the new world order. The transnational corporations were the prime movers of mobility back in the 1970s. Since then finance has become the new fluid communicator and now ideas and people join that world of flows. None of these is exactly 'footloose and fancy free', certainly not labour. I contend that Manuel Castells was wrong to posit that "capital and labour live in different places and times" (1996: 475). The image he portrayed was one where global capital exists in the space of flows and lives in the instant time of computerized networks, whereas labour is mainly local, exists in the space of places and lives by ordinary clock time. Even a decade since this verdict, it seems strangely dated. Today the interesting research question is not whether mobility exists but

rather who controls labour mobility (Anderson, 2007: 6). Workers are mobile across national frontiers but then they do not become static. While labour markets are in theory deregulated, the status of the immigrant can alter through state action, employer intervention or through their own actions. Mobility clearly cannot be conceived of as an either/or type of question.

Another keyword in the lexicon of the global political economy of work since the 1980s is that of flexibility. For globalizing capital, the flexibilization of labour was a key imperative. This entailed functional flexibility, wage flexibility and numerical flexibility. Spatial or geographical flexibility of labour was required to feed this process of rapidly accelerating capital accumulation: in 1970 there were 82 million people living outside their country of birth; by 2000 this figure had risen to 175 million. The drive towards labour flexibility was global in nature but took different national forms according to the embeddedness of the labour market and the strength of the labour movement. The latter responded with a concerted campaign for a 'social clause' to be included in multilateral trade agreements to prevent what is referred to as 'social dumping'. This called for adhering to the International Labour Organization's 'core conventions' such as the right to organize and the abolition of forced labour. Ten years later, there is no clear-cut international agreement to protect labour standards.

Another word now making a comeback is that of 'informality' and/or precarization. Informality is a term which dates back to the 1960s and refers to labour markets and labour processes outside the domain of the state (Hilgers, 2008). It was also associated with the concept of marginality. Precarious work – and the associated terms of precarization and precariat (from proletariat) – is a more recent term denoting the uncertain, difficult and unstable forms of labour to which migrants are subjected. It ranges from seasonal and temporary agricultural employment to homework, from flexi-time workers to the self-employed. On a global scale, precarious work is no longer seen as the exception. For its proponents, "it is an analytical term for a process, which hints at a new quality of societal labour" (Hagen, 2008). Domestic work in particular demonstrates the nature of the new precarious work process where gender, race and the new capitalism intersect (Rodriguez, 2007). Labour and society, production and reproduction, North and South, formal and

informal, legal and illegal can no longer be rigorously separated.

### **Migration and Development**

“A specter haunts the world and it is the specter of migration” (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 213).

This was the somewhat apocalyptic message of Hardt and Negri in their best-selling communist manifesto for the twenty-first century. From the other political shore, neoliberal guru Milton Friedman is reputed to have said, “[t]he least said about migration the better.” That attitude is understandable because there is no logical reason within the free market paradigm why goods, finance and ideas should move across borders freely but not people. Migration is, certainly, a major issue for the strategists of global governance and hence there is some speculation about setting up a World Migration Organization along the lines of the World Trade Organization. Our focus here, however, is on globalization and migration from a labour movement perspective, particularly the prospects for the International Labour Organization’s ‘Decent Work’ campaign as a progressive strategy for social reform.

We exist in the era of globalization, albeit one where the certainty that there ‘there is no alternative’ has evaporated with the global financial crisis of the autumn of 2008. From a global perspective, globalization is, apart from anything else, a development strategy. A plethora of recent books (see Leadbetter, 2002, Bhagwati, 2004, Woolf, 2004) have promoted globalization as the answer to global poverty. Jagdish Bhagwati, in particular, defends globalization from a development perspective. In relation to migration, Bhagwati argues that the future belongs to those nations which grasp the reality of migration, “and creatively work with migrants and migration. Others will lag behind, still seeking restrictive measures to control and cut the level of migration. The future certainly belongs to the former” (2004: 218). In practice, this is a minority view amongst state planners, although one that may well be increasing in importance. Migration still symbolizes the importance (or the relative weakness) of national sovereignty as implemented through the control of national borders. The migrant, we could say, is in a liminal position betwixt and

between national borders, part mobile and part settled. Arguably, migration will be a test case for the managers of globalization and will be a key test case in determining whether sustainable global governance is achieved or not.

We could also argue that migration is a test case for the contemporary labour movement. Historically, trade unions have been as likely to be hostile towards migrants as not (see Penninx and Roosblad, 2000). The formation of the working class and of the labour movement has been a national, if not nationalist process. Workers may unite to exercise their collective strength but they may also combine on the basis of gender, ethnicity/race and national origin. With globalization unleashing a new and powerful process of capitalist restructuring and disembedding of the market, there will be a tendency towards just such a reaction. Solidarity might increasingly be seen as something which begins at home. However, there are signs – albeit sporadic and isolated – that many labour movements are orienting towards migrant workers in a unifying and solidaristic way. Migrants may well provide trade unions with an opportunity for revitalization after the long neoliberal onslaught, especially now that the unregulated market model has imploded. Addressing migration in a democratic and egalitarian manner may also revive the moral authority of the labour movement in the wider reaches of society. In terms of building hegemony and articulating a new common sense, radical democratic labour stance towards migration could form part of a new renaissance.

It is necessary and arguably overdue to address the conceptual and disciplinary separation of the migration and development problematics. This is partly due to academic specialisms whereby closely related phenomena are studied in splendid isolation. Perhaps the problem is a deeper one and reflects the enduring influence of Eurocentrism in the social sciences (see Quijano, 2000). While there is now increasing interest in the relationship between development and migration, it is invariably from a Northern perspective, with a firm focus on security, border controls, integration and the importance of economic remittances. In the 1950s, development was seen as unproblematic, the inevitable product of the process of modernization. For many decades however, the practice has revealed that it led to the ‘development of underdevelopment’, in a manner of speaking. To adopt a Southern or a global



perspective means much more than simply taking a sender-country optic. As Stephen Castles and Raúl Delgado Wise point out, “[i]t means developing a holistic and integrated analysis which examines each specific phenomena (such as migration and development) in the broader context of the inherent dynamics of North-South relations” (Castles and Delgado Wise, 2007: 14). That task now needs to take cognizance of the current global complexities and the increasing uncertainty around even the basic parameters of the capitalist system since the great financial crisis of October 2008.

The neoliberal narrative assumes a mutually beneficial relationship between migration and development; indeed that has been the major theme in recent global migration debates and policy formulation. The sending country is seen as the major beneficiary and, overall, migrants are regarded as a burden on and even a threat to the affluent North. This discourse seeks to bury any critical understanding of the root causes of global labour migration such as uneven development and the continued subjugation of the South by the dominant capitalist regimes, not least through the active policies of neoliberal globalization. Migrants represent a return to colonial-era forced labour patterns as the export of cheap labour becomes seen as a viable and legitimate pathway to development. Migrants are vulnerable and super-exploited, subject to precarization and criminalization. Capitalist accumulation on a world scale is currently deepening these tendencies towards the expulsion of labour from meaningful employment. The remittances sent home by migrants are regarded as a major contribution to development, but in fact they are just the human face of a thoroughly inhumane system that condemns millions to an increasingly difficult struggle for survival.

### **Old World/New World**

A 2003 interview with the President of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) on the informal economy and migration was headlined: “Enlarged Europe under threat from the informal economy” (ICFTU, 2003). Implicitly, migrants are also viewed as a ‘threat’ even though the ICFTU argues that “migration also brings some positive aspects, for example when Germany invites certain professionals like Czech computer engineers because of a lack of qualified labour ...” (ICFTU, 2003). The underlying problem with this

optic is its Eurocentrism, which still persists in seeing labour patterns in a small part of the world, for a short period of time, as the norm. Ulrich Beck coined the term 'Brazilianization' to describe how: "[t]he social structure in the heartlands of the West is coming to resemble the patchwork quilt of the South, characterized by diversity, unclarity and insecurity in people's lives and work" (Beck, 2000: 1). Thus the rise of 'informal' employment patterns and precarious work forms is seen as the West becoming like the Rest. From a global perspective, this would be hardly surprising and we should not continue to centre the exceptional patterns of Western Europe as though it was the norm against which all other experiences should be measured.

The geography of contemporary globalization is related closely to the history of colonialism and imperialism even if this is not usually made explicit in globalization theory. Likewise, the way in which race and ethnicity are key elements in global migration are not usually brought to the forefront even in critical migration studies. Certainly these divides do not map onto migration patterns as clearly or as visibly as do wealth/poverty differentials. If we accept that there is no such thing as a truly global labour market, then it is bound to be segmented, even segregated, along race/ethnicity lines, amongst others. If the history of empire was the story of race, so the unfolding history of globalization and its discontents (and resistance to them) must be written in the grammar of race and ethnicity. However, the dominant labour market model of migration does not really contribute to critically deconstructing this process. As Caroline Knowles argues, "[m]apping the trajectories of human mobility and the conditions in which they are produced is an urgent task in the analysis of globalisation's racial and ethnic grammar and the race making that produced it" (Knowles, 2004: 124).

In regards to how 'race' operates in relation to 'migration', as Philip Marfleet puts it, simply and clearly: "[i]mmigration control, racism and exclusion are inseparable" (Marfleet, 2006: 289). Globalization theories have, by and large, neglected race and ethnicity in their accounts of the making of the new global order. While racism and anti-immigrantism are certainly not synonymous with each other by any means, the racialization of migration debates has to be noted, analyzed and acted upon. Racist and (the sometimes quite distinct) xenophobic discourses are not atavistic and timeless

notions of difference but are rather mechanisms for social exclusion. We need to explore the particular processes of making and unmaking of racism in an era of flux and insecurity. In the area of immigration control, at the national borders where the writ of human rights barely applies, race, ethnicity and national categories are explicitly deployed to filter out the undesirable, the unclean and the unworthy. Today, the most clearly differentiated is the Muslim 'other', viewed as bearer of the most retrograde social customs, cultural norms and terrorist impulses.

Now that we are beginning to understand how the 'old world' and the 'new world' are always/already linked asymmetrically, we can return to how trade unions and the labour movement have taken up the challenges of this old/new world. While the dominant global unions (those in Western Europe, given their weight in the ICFTU) began to face up to the crisis of Fordism/Keynesianism/Welfare State in the 1990s, their counterparts in the global South had already faced 'structural adjustment' a decade or more earlier. Social movement unionism emerged in Brazil, South Africa and South Korea in the early 1980s as an innovative response to authoritarian industrialization drives by the state. While it appeared that workers in the North during the Golden Era of North Atlantic capitalism were the undisputed pioneers of organizational methods and ideological innovation, that was no longer the case. Globalization was integrating production on an unprecedented scale and brought together the fates of workers across the world. Instead of the classic 'trade union imperialism', Northern trade unionists were looking South for inspiration on how to take on CCC globalization.

A shift in dominant trade union attitudes occurred in the between 1995 and 2005. In 1995, the International Congress of Trade Unions attended the UN Social Summit in Copenhagen and was distressed to find it had lost its place at the 'top table', once its prerogative when corporatism and partnership dominated. A decade later, the trade unions had become an integral element of the World Social Forum and its regional offshoots. Trade unions appeared to be recognizing that they were (once again) a social movement and not a privileged interlocutor of the state and capital behind closed doors. By 1999, the many battalions of the US trade union movement joined the coming out of the counter-globalization party at Seattle and the 'Teamsters-Turtles unite and

fight' slogan was coined. Of course, this 'socialization' of the organized labour movement was bound to be uneven. In 1999, a new reforming General Secretary of the ILO (International Labour Organization), Juan Somavia, pledged to bring the international NGOs into dialogue with this tripartite organization but his plans were blocked by the ILO's Employers' Section and, most vociferously, by its misnamed Workers' Section.

### **Decent Work?**

There have been a number of coherent responses to the challenges of globalization or, rather, to its downsides. In terms of achieving stable global governance it had become clear by around 2000 that unless globalization achieved a 'human face' it would not be sustainable. Thus, the World Bank became concerned with establishing a 'safety net' as the free-marketization implicit in globalization excluded many from the capacity to earn a basic livelihood. Even the much-vaunted Washington Consensus, which set the tone for the 1990s in terms of an economic policy centred around privatization, marketization and liberalization, was subject to an internal critique and revision. All of these reforms from above were designed to make globalization more palatable, but not really to change the fundamentals. In relation to the world of work, the International Labour Organization advanced a new alternative paradigm through its overarching strategy to achieve 'decent work' in 1999. Decent work was conceived as the main underpinning for social and economic progress in the era of globalization and the vehicle for delivering the aspirations of people in their working lives.

The International Labour Office (ILO) was set up in 1919 to promote labour standards and embed the economy in society. In Polanyian terms, it was to take labour out of the market place as a commodity to be bought and sold like any other. The ILO was to set labour standards designed for varying national systems of regulation. These were to help regulate the national labour markets and offer protection for employees, assumed to be in stable full-time employment, comprised predominantly of males. There was also an explicit assumption that the Western European model of 'social partnership' was universal. This was the labour policy for the Keynesian era, based on full employment and the efficacy of macro-economic policy management. All this was to change in the 1970s as Keynesianism was swept aside by the

neoliberal revolution. By the 1980s, even in the European heartland, the ILO view of the world had collapsed in reality. Unemployment was rife, and the crisis of ‘competitiveness’ was blamed on the social model, including the protective regulation at the core of the ILO’s *raison d’être* and the nefarious interference of collective bargaining institutions seen as distorting the market.

The ILO played a modest role during the disintegration of the Soviet system in the late 1980s, through the promotion of a social-market model in opposition to the free-market fundamentalists. However, in the 1990s, as globalization and labour market flexibility became dominant, the ILO began to lose direction. The Decent Work campaign was designed to overcome this crisis; it has become widely accepted, at least on an official level. Concerned to present Decent Work as a non-ideological issue, the ILO seems to have lost any sense of vision. As a campaign, it is even a step back from the historic ILO ‘labour directives’ now subsumed under vague rubrics which are already part of international law such as the prohibition of child labour. The main problem is that today’s world is not the world of 1919 or even 1969 when the ILO received the Nobel Peace Prize. As Guy Standing puts it: “[t]he ILO was set up as a means of legitimizing labourism, a system of employer-employee relations based on the standard employment relationship, and a means of taking labour out of international trade” (Standing, 2008: 380). Tri-partite labour relations are hardly the dominant model, the standard employment relationship survives only in small pockets, and labour is clearly a commodity on the global labour market.

We could of course argue that ‘decent work’ is better than the ‘race to the bottom’. Certainly it is motivated by a reformist urge, but we can still question whether it is, or can be, a labour movement project. Peter Waterman has characterized the Decent Work campaign as “backward-looking utopianism” (Waterman, 2008). It certainly is premised on a world of nation states and orderly industrial relations which are either dying or never existed in most of globe. It is also Utopian in the sense that it is premised on the myth that a golden era of social harmony existed even in the imperial heartlands. We could ask whether the campaign for Decent Work, despite its limitations, could play a role for “poverty reduction and a fair and inclusive globalization” (ILO, 2008) as its proponents argue. However we need to be skeptical because of the inherent

weakness of the ILO compared to the global governance managers in the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF. Global governance must promote a 'human face' for its essentially neoliberal project if it is to be seen as legitimate. However, the capital accumulation project and its social legitimation drive are, ultimately, part and parcel of an overall programme of capitalist modernization which is detrimental to labour.

### **Migrants are Workers**

We will now focus directly on the issue of migrants as workers for several inter-related reasons. It is an issue which causes severe discomfort for neoliberal thinkers. Its one-time guru Milton Friedman is reported to have said that “[a]bout migration the least said the better.” This is understandable because there appears to be no logical reason why capital, investment and ideas should flow freely across national frontiers, and not labour. At present, international mobility is granted to a small elite of professional workers with skills required in affluent countries. For the many of the world's workers, national borders are, if anything, less permeable in the so-called era of globalization than in the past. Migration is securitized and the full panoply of state surveillance and repression falls on those who take globalization at its word and go off to improve their situation. Despite some tentative international discussions about the need for a World Migration Organization on par with the WTO to regulate migration, it is most likely to remain a messy and fuzzy issue for the managers of global capitalism. Could it be an opportunity for the social counter-movement now challenging the undisputed role of the unregulated market?

Historically, the trade union movement has also had severe difficulties in dealing with migration in a manner which accorded with its basic principles. Too often labour activists and analysts imbued with the spirit of labour internationalism forget how often workers themselves draw on non-class forms of identity to protect themselves from the maelstrom of capitalist restructuring. While capital may well treat labour as an undifferentiated commodity, workers invariably find bonds of gender, place and race to create solidarity around their struggle to keep some kind of advantage in the chaos caused by modernization/globalization. For Giovanni Arrighi, “[a]s a

consequence, patriarchalism, racism and national-chauvinism have been integral to the making of the world labour movement” (Arrighi, 1990: 93). This is a history often overlooked in the annals of the official trade union movement (and its critics for that matter) which tend to airbrush out the sexism, racism and xenophobia which forms an integral element of most labour movements. To recognize it, is, perhaps, the first step to dealing with it, rather than relying on anodyne stories of solidarity and internationalism.

There is perhaps a compelling argument that “solidarity with migrant workers is helping trade unions to get back to the basic principles of the labour movement” (David, n.d.). On the one hand, trade unions have been facing a crisis of declining membership and influence over the last two decades. On the other hand, many social and political systems find themselves bereft of leadership on the question of migration. From either side of the argument, trade unions have an opportunity. Across the world, trade unions are organizing with and on behalf of migrant workers (see Kahman, 2002; Gray, 2007, Wrench, 2004, PICUM, 2005). Trade unions have made common cause with migrant-led associations with NGOs supporting migrant workers and they have sought to organize migrants (“workers are workers are workers” is a common slogan). Of course, one effect of this drive is to minimize the ability of employers to use migrant workers to undercut pay and conditions for indigenous workers. Nevertheless, its net impact, as David argues, is that “in response to economic globalization, trade unions are organizing the globalization of solidarity in defence of migrants” (David, n.d.).

There are many practical examples emerging in Europe, in particular, where trade unions are addressing, in novel ways, the needs of migrant workers. In Spain, for example, the *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers Committees) of Communist party origins have set up a nation-wide network of Overseas Workers Information Centres (*Centros de Información para los Trabajadores Extranjeros - CITE*) which act as clearing houses for migrant issues ranging from visas to health, language and workplace issues. In 2001, the Spanish state passed a law making it a crime to assist undocumented migrant workers. Given there are over three quarters of a million workers without permits, this law is explicitly ignored by the unions. One *Comisiones* spokesperson makes the case for immigration: “[w]e need

immigration. The union must change and become a multicultural union. The illegals must obtain their papers....That is our vision” (Sahlström 2008). It is in such statements that we can see how the issues posed by migration, for example in relation to legality or in terms of what solidarity means, can disrupt old and stale trade union practices. The *Comisiones* have undoubtedly become a more agile and politically inventive labour organization since their engagement with migration issues. In Italy, the Christian Democrat trade union confederation, *Confederazione Italiana Sindacati dei Lavoratori*, have set up a similar broadly-based, migrant-oriented organization called The National Association for those Beyond the Frontiers (ANOLFL - *Associazione Nazionale Oltre Le Frontiere*) which has branches in Morocco and Senegal. ANOLF aims to organize migrants to defend their civil rights, but it also self-consciously seeks to act as ‘bridge’ (Sahlström, 2008) between the unions and other social organizations. For trade unions to support the self organization of migrants in such a way is a clear step in the direction of social movement unionism.

Generally speaking, trade unions seem slow to embrace a more social movement approach to labour organizing. Thus, in 1995 it was found that 97 per cent of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) union locals in the United States simply did not have an organizing or community outreach programme (Tate, 2005: 92). The continued relevance of trade unions for a multi-ethnic, multi-status workforce was clearly in question. Yet at the same time, there was a concerted drive by many in the trade union movement to organize migrant workers in particular. Immigrant-driven campaigns to organize, unionize and agitate for better conditions became more widespread. Often a campaign that began in one particular ethnic community expanded to embrace all migrant workers. In many cases it was not standard trade unions doing the organizing but, rather, a plethora of hybrid community organizations, workers centres, faith-based groups and nationality-based organizations. The dominant organizational form was, more often than not, based on these varied networks with their members working within but also without the organized labour movement. What these campaigns had in common, suggests Vanessa Tate, “was an aggressive organizing outlook that relied on community-based, social movement- style



tactics” (Tate, 2005: 191). It is too early to determine whether the renaissance over the last decade has changed the verdict of 1995 that trade unions in the US existed to serve a basically white male clientele, but certainly there is a counter-tendency emerging. Certainly at a global level we see increasing signs of innovative trade union and labour movement thinking where migration comes to the fore as both a challenge and an opportunity for labour (see Kloosterboer, 2007).

In the years to come international labour migration is bound to become more important both in quantitative terms but also in qualitative terms and it may well emerge as a defining issue for the trade union movement. One such ‘tipping point’ was the Irish Ferries dispute in Ireland in 2005 (see Krings, 2007). A well-unionized, cross-channel seafaring group was faced with a cost-cutting employer who decided that Latvian agency workers who could be paid half the legal minimum wage made good economic sense. The Irish trade union movement was shaken to its very foundations and rumours abounded about the imminent displacement of native workers by cheaper foreign imports. Quickly, this dispute became a test case, not least because it involved Ireland’s largest trade union the Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). Mass mobilization occurred and the employers were forced to negotiate by a government committed to social partnership. Nevertheless, the nativist reaction was just under the surface: in one mass mobilization by the trade unions seeking broader support for the Irish Ferries workers, official banners proclaiming “no slave ships in the Irish sea” jostled with other more rudimentary ones on the fringes declaring “Irish jobs for Irish workers”. In the end, the Irish labour movement made the improvement of conditions for migrant workers a ‘deal breaker’ in the next round of partnership talks with government and employers in 2006. Equalizing the conditions of labour upwards won greater support within the workers movement as a forward-looking labour strategy over the temptation to blame the ‘non-national’ workers brought in by cost-cutting employers.

### **Contesting Globalization**

Globalization, migration and the need for ‘decent work’ are inextricably linked problematics, or at least they should be.

To provide answers to the global development imperative it is essential that they be addressed conjointly in full cognizance of global complexity. From the perspective of the labour movement, migration poses a challenge, but also an opportunity. The era of national industrial relations systems and a national development paradigm has been superseded by globalization. Trade unions are currently restructuring at local, national, regional and global levels. They are acutely conscious of global development issues, not least through the emergence of China (to be followed by India and Brazil) as a global industrial power. The United Nations 'family' will address both development and migration within the context set by global governance mechanisms. The labour movement, while engaging critically at this level, is also moving towards a new global social movement unionism that will necessarily have migrant workers as one of its core critical concerns.

Trade unions today have a unified global peak organization, the International Trade Union Congress (ITUC), made possible by the end of the Cold War. The ITUC, since its inception in 2006, has sought to consolidate its 175 million members and provide a global voice for labour in the struggle over the future of globalization. For their part, the old International Trade Secretariats (ITS), whose origins go back to the earliest days of labour organizing, took on a new lease of life as the Global Unions which organized particular sectors such as metalwork, education, public service, engineering, transport and so on. In broad terms, we can state that labour is now increasingly organizing to confront actually existing globalization (see ITUC/CSI/IGB, 2009 for a statement on the economic crisis). Workers are active, both in the classic Marxist ways with the emerging proletariat in the dynamic industrializing parts of the global South, and in alliance with broader social movements, by their participation in Polanyian style social counter-movements that bring together those sectors of workers marginalized, pauperized and dispossessed by globalization.

If global capitalism today is characterised by uneven and combined development as much as it was in Marx's day, we are unlikely to see global unions springing up fully formed to confront it. The globalization of the working-class condition has clearly not worked out in the way that Marxists assumed or hoped for. Instead of generalizing and homogenizing the condition of

the industrial proletariat (of mid- nineteenth century Britain), proletarianization is occurring without Marxists' internationalist and revolutionary proletariat. Differentiation, rather than homogenization, seems to be the rule. By focusing on the spatial as well as social complexity of transnational labour relations and contestation, we move beyond the paradigm of globalization as subject. We must heed John Urry's warning that "many globalization analyses...deal insufficiently with the *complex* character of emerging social relations" (2000: 39). This is less true today, with second or third generation globalization studies focusing on global networks, communities and more cognisant of global complexity. In the new labour geography, there is also close attention to and understanding of how "[b]uilding solidarity across space – especially internationally – is not a straightforward matter, but rather is fraught with complexities" (Herod 2001: 218). Above all we must bear in mind that transnational labour practice is "as much about geography as it is about class" (Herod, 2001: 218). A general strategy for labour, fit for purpose in the era of globalization must, perforce, be simultaneously local-national-regional-global in its remit and it must also be aware of and open-to-all these levels whilst working, in practice, at one or another spatial level, such as the local or the national. The new multi-scalar capitalism requires a multi-scalar labour response capable of denaturalizing space and turning it to labour's advantage.

Finally in terms of developing a new paradigm for considering labour and global development, I want to develop (at least in labour studies) the question of post-colonialism and the subaltern perspective which has been neglected. Since the attacks on Wall Street and the Pentagon in 2001 and the global events unleashed since then, a new colonial question has emerged. The intrusion of the colonial world in the heart of financial and military power on '9/11' led inevitably to a brutal return of the colonizer to the post-colonial world. This 'return of the colonial' as Boa Santos puts it can be taken as, "a metaphor for those who perceive their life experiences as taking place on the other side of the line and rebel against it" (Santos, 2007: 55). For Santos, those suffering from 'radical exclusion and legal non-existence' are the terrorist, the undocumented migrant worker and the refugee. I would propose broadening out the category to embrace the workers of the world who are increasingly being dispossessed,

excluded and marginalized by a capital accumulation machine which is based on the concept of a self-adjusting market which cannot exist for any length of time “without annihilating the human and natural substance of society” as Polanyi prophetically put it (2001: 3).

We are, arguably, in an era of paradigmatic transition or, in Gramsci's terms, one in which the old is dying but the new has not yet been born. The long-term contest between East and West is now leading to the latter losing out as orientalism comes full circle. The ongoing historical North-South struggle is currently experiencing an increased level of contestation by the latter, not least in Latin America. As Boa Santos has argued, the new “emergent subjectivity is a subjectivity of the South, and flourishes in the South” (Santos, 1995: 186). Subjectivity is a key element and driver of the search for progressive paradigmatic transition. It allows us to break decisively with any lingering Eurocentrism and articulate a global emancipation perspective based on the world's majority populations. This new South is not (just) a geographical region but, rather, more of a cultural metaphor for all the subaltern classes, regions, neighbourhoods and households. This transformation project represents a clear rejection of the imperial universalism of such Eurocentric notions as ‘global civil society’ and a recovery of the struggles, aspirations and counter-hegemonic projects of actually existing global civil societies.

### **Endnotes**

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