

Trade Unions and NGOs:  
*A Necessary Partnership  
for Social Development*

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## Acronyms

<b>AFL-CIO</b>	American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations
<b>AIP</b>	Apparel Industry Partnership (United States)
<b>CCC</b>	Clean Clothes Campaign
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer (of a company)
<b>CNT</b>	Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (Spain)
<b>COSATU</b>	Congress of South African Trade Unions
<b>CSD</b>	Commission on Sustainable Development (United Nations)
<b>EI</b>	Education International
<b>EPZ</b>	Export Processing Zone
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FLA</b>	Fair Labor Association (United States)
<b>FNV</b>	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (Netherlands)
<b>FTF</b>	Salaried Employees and Civil Servants Confederation (Denmark)
<b>HKCIC</b>	Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee
<b>HKCTU</b>	Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions
<b>HRIC</b>	Human Rights in China
<b>ICCR</b>	Interfaith Council on Corporate Responsibility (United States)
<b>ICEM</b>	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions
<b>ICFTU</b>	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
<b>IFBWW</b>	International Federation of Building and Wood Workers
<b>IFN</b>	International Friends of Nature
<b>IFWEA</b>	International Federation of Workers' Education Associations
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IRENE</b>	International Restructuring Education Network Europe
<b>ISC</b>	International Study Circle
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for Standardization
<b>ITF</b>	International Transport Workers' Federation
<b>ITGLWF</b>	International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation
<b>ITS</b>	International Trade Secretariat
<b>IUF</b>	International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations
<b>IWW</b>	Industrial Workers of the World (United States)
<b>KOR</b>	Komitet Obrony Robotników (Workers' Defense Committee) (Poland)
<b>LARIC</b>	Labour Rights in China (Hong Kong)
<b>LO Denmark</b>	Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
<b>LO Norway</b>	Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions
<b>LO Sweden</b>	Swedish Trade Union Confederation
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>NOVIB</b>	Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Ontwikkelings-samenwerking (Netherlands)
<b>OI</b>	Oxfam International
<b>OPIC</b>	Olof Palme International Center
<b>Oxfam</b>	formerly the telegraphic address of the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (United Kingdom); now the name of the organization
<b>SA8000</b>	Social Accountability 8000
<b>SEWA</b>	Self Employed Women's Association (India)

<b>SEWU</b>	Self Employed Women's Union (South Africa)
<b>SiD</b>	Danish General Workers' Union
<b>SKP</b>	Sara Lee Knit Products
<b>SOLIDAR</b>	SOLIDAR is not an acronym: it is the name of the international federation of welfare and solidarity organizations of the socialist labour movement (formerly International Workers' Aid)
<b>TCO</b>	Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees
<b>TNC</b>	transnational corporation
<b>UNITE</b>	Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (United States/Canada)
<b>USSR</b>	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
<b>WFTU</b>	World Federation of Trade Unions
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization
<b>WWF</b>	World Wide Fund for Nature

## **Summary/Résumé/Resumen**

### ***Summary***

What distinguishes trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from other actors in civil society (for example mainstream churches, religious sects, educational institutions, professional associations)? This paper argues they are different because they have specific agendas for the improvement of society.

Unions have always held that a consistent defence of their members' interests over the long term requires them to work for people's overall well-being. Their vision of society includes elements such as political, social and industrial democracy, civil and democratic rights for all, the elimination of poverty, equality and the rule of law. In this respect, they can legitimately claim to be serving the interests of society generally, as can NGOs acting on a desire to advance and improve the human condition. Consequently, co-operation between unions and NGOs is possible and necessary in a shared perspective of building a society in which the satisfaction of basic human needs is the overriding priority.

This paper examines the conditions that unions and NGOs must meet to strengthen their alliance. It reviews the historical background, the existing record, the difficulties and the potential for co-operation.

Unions re-emerged after the Second World War in a favourable political context worldwide, which helped conceal the crippling losses inflicted by several decades of repression by totalitarian states and by the war itself. NGOs had already been created by the mostly social-democratic labour movement before and after the First World War to address the special needs of its membership (in the areas of welfare, housing, health, education, culture) and to advance its political agenda. These were not merely service organizations; they represented an attempt to create an alternative society or counter-culture.

During postwar reconstruction, labour NGOs disappeared—or survived with an abbreviated agenda. Trade unions largely withdrew into their “core business” (wages and conditions of employment). Several factors account for these developments: the loss of trained and experienced political leadership; the postwar social compromise based on the ideology of social partnership; reliance on the state to support the trade union agenda; and distortion of labour movement priorities through the Cold War.

The effect of globalization has been to break the balance of power between organized labour and organized business on which the postwar social consensus was based. The rise of transnational corporate power has been accompanied by a massive attack on all fronts (social, political, ideological, cultural) of the labour movement and on its values. It has also aggravated inequalities within and among countries and changed the role of the state to serve its purposes. The trade union movement was largely unprepared for these developments and was unable to offer an adequate political response.

Meanwhile, civil society had generated a large variety of voluntary organizations seeking to advance public interest issues, in part as a response to social problems created or aggravated by globalization. Many such organizations filled the vacuum left by the labour movement when it retreated from the broader social and political concerns it had sought to address in prewar decades.

Since the 1970s, co-operation between unions and NGOs has developed over a wide range of issues. It has been most established and successful so far in the defence of human rights, including workers' rights. In the field of development and education, unions have been active largely through labour movement NGOs (although sometimes with non-labour NGOs) and, in education, with academic institutions.

On women's rights and equality issues co-operation has been more problematic, because it implies a challenge to the traditional (male-dominated) culture of the labour movement. However, it is potentially the most important area of co-operation for organizing the growing sectors of the labour force worldwide (services, free trade zones, informal sector) and for regenerating the trade union movement itself.

More recently, union/NGO co-operation has developed on environmental issues, particularly in agriculture (pesticides and herbicides, chemical fertilizers, genetic engineering, seed patenting), forestry (sustainable exploitation of timber) and on issues of chemical pollution in industry and mining.

Corporate accountability has been another area of expanding union/NGO co-operation, especially when workers' rights are at issue; but in some instances unions have had to resist what they saw as an overly accommodating approach by NGOs toward company codes of conduct. While some NGOs have been prepared to accept such codes, including a monitoring role for themselves, unions stress that codes are no substitute for union organization and that monitoring is done most effectively by union organizations in the workplace. Unions therefore remain distrustful of unilaterally proclaimed codes of conduct and aim instead for international agreements.

Co-operation between unions and NGOs depends, in the first place, on shared objectives and, equally importantly, on the way the organizations involved operate (issues of legitimacy, transparency, accountability, management). Tensions between globalization—based on the neoliberal agenda (endorsed by most leading governments)—and the prospects for a just, egalitarian and democratic society (advocated by unions and most NGOs) have strengthened the case for co-operation.

In a globalizing economy and society, trade unions face three main tasks: organizing in transnational corporations; organizing the informal sector; and connecting with other civil society actors to advance a broader social and political agenda. In each of these areas they have formed partnerships with NGOs, and this trend will continue because it produces positive results. In the process, both unions and NGOs are changing. Important segments of the labour movement are returning to their roots in the form of "social movement unionism". On the NGO

side, the resilience of the trade union movement under conditions of adversity and its capacity for self-renewal have not gone unnoticed. NGOs wishing to act in the public interest are finding in trade unions the social anchor and reality check that neither their own constituency nor their relations with other social actors can provide.

Because the way society develops depends in large part on the global power relations resulting from the struggle between labour and organized business, the responsibility of building a broadly based peoples' movement for social progress and determining the direction it will take rests largely with the trade union movement and its allies.

Dan Gallin is the Chair of the Global Labour Institute, a foundation established in 1997 with its secretariat in Geneva, Switzerland.

### ***Résumé***

En quoi les syndicats et les organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) se distinguent-ils d'autres acteurs de la société civile (par exemple des Eglises traditionnelles, des sectes, des établissements d'enseignement, des associations professionnelles)? Selon cette étude, ils sont différents parce qu'ils ont un programme spécifique pour améliorer la société.

Les syndicats ont toujours soutenu qu'une défense cohérente de leurs adhérents les obligeait à long terme à travailler pour le bien-être de la population en général. La démocratie en politique, dans la société et dans l'industrie; des droits civils et démocratiques pour tous; l'élimination de la pauvreté; l'égalité et la primauté du droit font partie de leur vision de la société. A cet égard, ils peuvent légitimement prétendre servir les intérêts de la société dans son ensemble, tout comme les ONG mues par le désir de faire progresser et d'améliorer la condition humaine. En conséquence, la coopération entre syndicats et ONG est possible et nécessaire dès lors que le but commun est de construire une société où la satisfaction des besoins essentiels des êtres humains a la priorité absolue.

L'auteur examine les conditions que syndicats et ONG doivent remplir pour renforcer leur alliance. Il porte son regard sur les origines historiques, les résultats déjà obtenus, les difficultés et les possibilités d'une coopération.

Les syndicats sont réapparus dans le monde entier après la deuxième guerre mondiale alors que le contexte politique était favorable, ce qui a contribué à dissimuler le rude coup porté par les Etats totalitaires pendant plusieurs décennies de répression et par la guerre elle-même. Le mouvement syndical à majorité social-démocrate avait déjà créé des ONG avant et après la première guerre mondiale pour répondre aux besoins spéciaux de ses membres (dans les domaines de la protection sociale, du logement, de la santé, de l'éducation et de la culture) et promouvoir son programme politique. Ces ONG n'étaient pas seulement des organisations de service; elles essayaient de créer une autre société ou une contre-culture.



Pendant la reconstruction de l'après-guerre, les ONG syndicales ont disparu ou survécu avec un programme allégé. Les syndicats se sont dans une large mesure repliés sur leur "activité de base" (défense des salaires et des conditions d'emploi). Plusieurs facteurs expliquent cette évolution: la perte de dirigeants politiques entraînés et expérimentés; le compromis social de l'après-guerre, fondé sur l'idéologie du contrat social; l'Etat sur lequel on comptait pour appuyer le programme syndical et la guerre froide qui faussait les priorités du mouvement syndical.

La mondialisation a eu pour effet de rompre l'équilibre des forces entre les organisations syndicales et patronales, sur lequel reposait le consensus social de l'après-guerre. La montée en puissance des sociétés transnationales s'est accompagnée d'une attaque massive contre le mouvement syndical et ses valeurs, lequel s'est trouvé menacé sur tous les fronts (social, politique, idéologique, culturel). Elle a aussi creusé les inégalités à l'intérieur des pays et entre eux et modifié le rôle de l'Etat pour que celui-ci serve ses intérêts. Le mouvement syndical, mal préparé à une telle évolution, n'a pas su trouver la riposte politique adéquate.

Entre-temps, la société civile a donné naissance à de multiples organisations bénévoles cherchant à défendre des causes d'intérêt public, en partie en réponse aux problèmes sociaux créés ou aggravés par la mondialisation. Beaucoup de ces organisations ont comblé le vide laissé par le mouvement syndical lorsqu'il a abandonné les grandes préoccupations sociales et politiques qui avaient été les siennes dans les décennies d'avant-guerre.

Depuis les années 70, la coopération entre syndicats et ONG s'est développée sur les questions les plus diverses. C'est jusqu'à présent dans la défense des droits de l'homme, notamment des droits des travailleurs, qu'elle s'est affirmée avec le plus de succès. Dans le domaine du développement et de l'éducation, les syndicats ont été surtout actifs au travers des ONG du mouvement syndical (mais aussi parfois avec d'autres ONG) et, dans le domaine de l'éducation, avec les établissements universitaires.

Sur les droits des femmes et les questions d'égalité, la coopération a été plus problématique parce qu'elle revient indirectement à contester la culture traditionnelle du mouvement syndical (dominée par les hommes). Pourtant, la coopération dans ce domaine pourrait avoir une énorme importance pour l'organisation des travailleurs dans des secteurs en pleine expansion dans le monde entier (services, zones de libre échange, secteur informel) et pour la renaissance du mouvement syndical lui-même.

Récemment, la coopération syndicats-ONG s'est développée sur le terrain de l'environnement, en particulier en agriculture (pesticides et herbicides, engrais chimiques, génie génétique, dépôt de brevets pour les semences), en sylviculture (exploitation durable du bois) et sur les questions de la pollution chimique dans l'industrie et l'extraction minière.

La responsabilité des entreprises fait également l'objet d'une coopération de plus en plus large entre syndicats et ONG, en particulier quand les droits des travailleurs sont en cause. Mais dans certains cas, les syndicats ont dû s'opposer aux ONG, un peu trop accommodantes à leur goût à l'égard des

codes de conduite des sociétés. Si certaines ONG sont prêtes à accepter ces codes, y compris le rôle de surveillance qu'ils leur assignent, les syndicats soulignent que ces codes ne remplacent pas l'organisation syndicale et que ce sont les organisations syndicales sur les lieux de travail qui exercent le meilleur contrôle. Les syndicats continuent donc à considérer avec méfiance les codes de conduite proclamés unilatéralement et recherchent plutôt des accords internationaux.

La coopération entre syndicats et ONG dépend d'abord d'objectifs communs et, ce qui est tout aussi important, de la manière dont les organisations impliquées fonctionnent (questions de légitimité, de transparence, responsabilité, gestion). Les tensions entre la mondialisation, qui s'adosse au programme néolibéral (auquel adhèrent la plupart des gouvernements des pays de tête), et les chances de voir se construire la société juste, égalitaire et démocratique (que réclament les syndicats et la plupart des ONG) militent avec une force nouvelle en faveur de la coopération.

Dans une économie et une société en voie de mondialisation, les syndicats ont trois fonctions majeures: organiser au sein même des sociétés transnationales, organiser le secteur informel et s'allier à d'autres acteurs de la société civile pour défendre un programme social et politique plus large. Dans chacun de ces domaines, ils ont conclu des partenariats avec des ONG et cette tendance va persister car elle donne de bons résultats. Ce faisant, syndicats et ONG changent. Des pans entiers du mouvement syndical retournent à leurs origines sous la forme d'un "syndicalisme de mouvements sociaux". La résistance du mouvement syndical dans l'adversité et sa faculté de renouveau ne sont pas passées inaperçues des ONG. Celles qui veulent agir dans l'intérêt public trouvent dans les syndicats l'ancrage social et la prise sur le réel que ni leur public ni leurs relations avec d'autres acteurs sociaux ne peuvent leur apporter.

Parce que l'évolution de la société dépend dans une large mesure de la lutte entre travailleurs et entreprises et des rapports de force mondiaux qui en résulteront, c'est dans une large mesure au mouvement syndical et à ses alliés que reviendra la responsabilité de constituer un vaste mouvement populaire pour le progrès social et de décider de l'orientation à lui donner.

Dan Gallin est président du Global Labour Institute, fondation créée en 1997 dont le secrétariat est à Genève, Suisse.

### **Resumen**

¿En qué se diferencian los sindicatos y las organizaciones no gubernamentales (ONG) de otros actores de la sociedad civil (por ejemplo, iglesias principales, sectas religiosas, instituciones de enseñanza, asociaciones profesionales)? En el presente informe se defiende que su diferencia radica en sus programas específicos para mejorar la sociedad.

Los sindicatos siempre han sostenido que para defender constantemente los intereses de sus miembros a largo plazo necesitan luchar por el bienestar general de las personas. Esta visión de la sociedad incluye factores como la democracia política, social e industrial, derechos civiles y democráticos para todos, la eliminación de la pobreza, la igualdad y el respeto de la ley. En este

sentido, pueden afirmar legítimamente que atienden los intereses de la sociedad en general, al igual que de las ONG, cuya labor está encaminada a mejorar la condición humana. En consecuencia, la cooperación entre los sindicatos y las ONG es posible y necesaria para poder crear una sociedad en que la atención de las necesidades humanas básicas tiene prioridad absoluta.

En este informe se estudian las condiciones que deben cumplir los sindicatos y las ONG para reforzar su cooperación. Se analizan sus antecedentes históricos, su situación actual, las dificultades a las que se enfrentan y la posible cooperación.

Los sindicatos reaparecieron tras la segunda Guerra mundial en un entorno político favorable en todo el mundo, lo que ayudó a encubrir las grandes pérdidas ocasionadas por varias décadas de represión en los estados totalitarios y por la guerra propiamente dicha. Antes y después de la primera Guerra mundial, las ONG ya habían sido creadas por el movimiento sindicalista fundamentalmente social-demócrata, para atender las necesidades particulares de sus miembros (en los sectores del bienestar social, la vivienda, la sanidad, la educación y la cultura) y para fomentar su programa político. No eran únicamente organizaciones de servicios, sino que representaban el deseo de crear una sociedad alternativa o una contracultura.

Las ONG obreras desaparecieron durante la reconstrucción de la posguerra—o sobrevivieron, pero con un programa reducido. Los sindicatos se centraron en su mayor parte en su “cometido principal” (salarios y condiciones de empleo). Estos cambios se deben a varios factores: la pérdida de líderes políticos expertos y competentes; el compromiso social de la posguerra, basado en la ideología de la colaboración social; confianza en que el Estado respaldara el programa de los sindicatos y el cambio de prioridades del movimiento sindicalista durante la guerra fría.

La mundialización ha dado lugar a que se rompa el equilibrio de fuerzas entre el movimiento sindicalista organizado y la actividad comercial organizada en que se basaba el consenso social de la posguerra. Al aumentar el poder corporativo transnacional, todos los sectores y los valores del movimiento sindicalista han sido objeto de una crítica general. La mundialización también ha dado lugar a que aumenten las desigualdades a nivel nacional y entre los países, y ha cambiado la función del Estado para defender sus propios intereses. El movimiento sindicalista no estaba preparado en absoluto para estos cambios y fue incapaz de dar una respuesta política adecuada.

Entretanto, la sociedad civil había establecido una gran diversidad de organizaciones voluntarias para defender los asuntos de interés público, en parte como respuesta a los problemas sociales creados o agravados por la mundialización. Muchas de estas organizaciones asumieron la misión del movimiento sindicalista, cuando éste se desentendió de las cuestiones sociales y políticas más amplias que había tratado de abordar en las décadas de la preguerra.

Desde la década de los años 70, la cooperación entre los sindicatos y las ONG se ha estrechado con relación a una gran variedad de cuestiones. Hasta ahora dicha cooperación es más sólida y satisfactoria en lo referente a la defensa de los derechos humanos, inclusive los derechos de los

trabajadores. En el sector del desarrollo y la enseñanza, los sindicatos han permanecido activos en su mayor parte a través de las ONG del movimiento sindicalista (aunque a veces con las ONG no centradas en el trabajo) y, en el ámbito de la enseñanza, a través de las instituciones académicas.

La cooperación ha sido más problemática en el ámbito de los derechos de la mujer y las cuestiones de igualdad, ya que supone un desafío a la cultura tradicional (dominada por el hombre) del movimiento sindicalista. Sin embargo, éste es potencialmente el ámbito más importante de la cooperación para organizar los sectores crecientes de la población activa en todo el mundo (servicios, zonas de libre comercio, sector extraoficial) y para activar el movimiento sindicalista propiamente dicho.

En los últimos tiempos, la cooperación entre los sindicatos y las ONG se ha reforzado en el ámbito de las cuestiones ambientales, particularmente en el sector de la agricultura (pesticidas y herbicidas, fertilizantes químicos, ingeniería genética, patentabilidad de las semillas), la silvicultura (explotación sostenible de la madera) y en los aspectos a la contaminación química en la industria y la minería.

La responsabilidad de las empresas constituye otro ámbito en el que los sindicatos y las ONG también han colaborado más estrechamente, en particular con referencia a los derechos de los trabajadores; sin embargo, los sindicatos han tenido que oponer resistencia en algunos casos a lo que consideraban una postura excesivamente servicial por parte de las ONG con respecto a los códigos de conducta de las empresas. Si bien algunas ONG han estado dispuestas a aceptar estos códigos, incluida la función de control que desempeñarán ellas mismas, los sindicatos insisten en que los códigos no son un sustituto de la organización sindical y que la labor de control de las organizaciones sindicales se ejerce con mayor eficacia en el lugar de trabajo. Por tanto, los sindicatos deberán desconfiar de los códigos de conducta establecidos unilateralmente y aspirar, en su lugar, a que se concluyan acuerdos internacionales.

La cooperación entre los sindicatos y las ONG depende, en primer lugar, de los objetivos comunes y—no menos importante—del modo en que funcionan las organizaciones actores (cuestiones de legalidad, transparencia, responsabilidad, dirección). La cooperación se ha visto reforzada por las tensiones entre la mundialización—basada en el programa neoliberal (respaldado por la mayoría de los gobiernos dirigentes)—y las perspectivas de una sociedad justa, equitativa y democrática (defendida por los sindicatos y la mayoría de las ONG).

Los sindicatos se enfrentan a tres misiones principales en una economía y sociedad en vías de mundialización: encargarse de la organización de las empresas transnacionales, organizar el sector extraoficial y ponerse en contacto con otros actores de la sociedad civil para fomentar un programa político y social más amplio. Han establecido asociaciones con organizaciones no gubernamentales en cada uno de estos ámbitos y esta tendencia continuará, en vista de los resultados positivos obtenidos. Tanto los sindicatos como las ONG están experimentando cambios en este proceso. Algunos sectores importantes del movimiento sindicalista están resurgiendo como “sindicalismo del movimiento social”. Por su parte, las ONG han constatado

la capacidad de recuperación del movimiento sindicalista en tiempos difíciles y de reorganización interna. Los sindicatos están ofreciendo a las ONG que desean velar por el interés público la coordinación social y la inspección de la realidad que ni el propio sector de las mismas ni sus relaciones con otros actores de la sociedad civil pueden facilitarles.

Dado que el modo en que evoluciona la sociedad depende en gran parte de las relaciones de poder a nivel mundial, la responsabilidad de crear un amplio movimiento popular para fomentar el progreso social y de determinar la dirección que éste adoptará corresponde fundamentalmente al movimiento sindicalista y a las instituciones que cooperan con el mismo.

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## Introduction

This paper explores issues arising in relations between trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These relations have a long history and are complex, ranging from close co-operation to problematic relationships. When unions and NGOs co-operate, their joint impact on social and political events can be quite powerful. When such co-operation fails, it can significantly set back the agenda of both. Consequently, success or failure in union/NGO co-operation will affect the direction and the pace of social development or, in general terms, what world society will look like in the coming decades.

Both unions and NGOs are civil society actors. What they have in common are specific agendas for the improvement of society. Trade unions have always held that a consistent defence of the interests of their members over the long term required them to work on issues (including political and social democracy, civil and democratic rights, poverty elimination, equality, and the rule of law) influencing the well-being of people and society as a whole. They could thus legitimately claim to be serving the interests of society in general, as could NGOs acting on the desire to advance and improve the human condition.

Almost 20 years ago, I suggested that alliances between unions and NGOs had to be an essential element of an international labour strategy to balance the growing power of transnational corporations (TNCs) on a global scale. I argued that the broader social agenda of the labour movement could be advanced only through "the building of broad popular coalitions, with the trade union movement at their centre, but bringing together many civic groups, issue-oriented movements and other popular groups that perceive, each in its own way, the social threat that corporate power represents and whose areas of concern overlap, in different degrees, with that of the labour movement."<sup>1</sup>

In the two decades that have elapsed, the power of TNCs has grown enormously. As a result of globalization, transnationalized capital is now in a position to escape the demands of political society, in particular of the labour movement and the political left. Capital is therefore no longer interested, as it had to be in the 30 years following the war, in contributing financially and politically to a social compromise. Instead, it seeks hegemony. It has declared its own goals to be the general goals of society, has surrounded itself with ideological bodyguards in universities and the media, makes increasing demands on public resources to advance its own interests, and meets all opposition with unrelenting hostility.

It is clear that this context has influenced union/NGO relations, and in contradictory ways, positively and negatively. One of the effects has been to accentuate divisions in the NGO community, between those who have developed a sense of urgency about forming alliances

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Gallin, "Unions and transnationals: The beginnings of an international response", in *The New International Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, New York, 1980.

with trade unions around a common—alternative—agenda, and those who are tempted to accommodate what has been called the New Policy Agenda.<sup>2</sup>

The same polarization between resistance and accommodation can be observed in the trade union movement, although unions, by the nature of the constituency to which they are immediately accountable, their membership, have more limited choices so far as their strategy is concerned.

It is therefore of some importance to identify the areas and the issues where unions and NGOs can co-operate, the conditions under which such co-operation is possible, the obstacles to co-operation, the areas where conflicts of interest arise, and the significance of such conflicts in a perspective of social development.

## **Organized Labour: From Postwar Reconstruction to Globalization**

To understand the present situation a flashback is needed to the point where it originated, the end of the Second World War, when the organized labour movement reconstituted itself in formerly Nazi-occupied Europe and in Japan.

Superficially, the conditions of its re-emergence looked promising. Organized business was in a weak political position. It carried the guilt of having supported fascism, first in Italy, Germany and Austria and then in all of occupied Europe, with a few honourable exceptions. The political mood of the time was therefore anti-capitalist. In France, there were punitive nationalizations. The German Christian-Democrats adopted at their first congress (Aalen) what amounted to a socialist program. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), at the peak of its prestige and with half of Europe under its control, may not have been socialist but was in any event anti-capitalist. In Japan, organized business had supported the military dictatorship and the war, and the occupation authorities, as in Germany, tried to bust the trusts. In the United States, the dominant power of the postwar world, the government was still New Deal Democrat and pro-labour, and in the United Kingdom Clement Attlee led a reforming Labour government.

Whatever else fascism may have been, it was certainly a gigantic union-busting exercise. The unions, allied to the re-emerging left, were riding the crest of the Allied victory, whereas business, at any rate in continental Europe and Japan, had lost the war. Therefore trade union rights, in their most extensive form, were taken for granted and incorporated in all postwar legislation.

But the labour movement that re-emerged under these conditions was not the prewar labour movement. It had been bled of its leadership: at least two political generations had disappeared

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Edwards (Save the Children Fund) and David Hulme (Institute for Development Policy and Management, University of Manchester), **NGOs and Development: Performance and Accountability in the "New World Order"**, a background paper circulated to participants at an international workshop on NGOs and development, 27–29 June 1994, University of Manchester; referring to Mark Robinson, **Governance, Democracy and Conditionality: NGOs and the New Policy Agenda**, 1993.



in concentration camps, the war, or exile, with few returning. The survivors were quickly exhausted and the successors lacked training, experience and political vision.

In Eastern Europe where (with the exception of Czechoslovakia) the trade union movement was never strong in the first place, the social democratic, socialist, dissident communist and other independent cadres that survived the war disappeared in the jails and labour camps of the USSR Committee for State Security (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB)). Trade unions were forcibly dissolved and replaced by repressive state institutions of labour administration by the same name.

In Japan, two types of unions emerged under American occupation: the successor organizations to the "patriotic" labour organizations of the dictatorship, in general enterprise-based and management-controlled, and genuine unions (often also enterprise-based) led by socialists and communists coming out of jail.

Social reconstruction, financed in large part by the United States (in Europe through the Marshall Plan), therefore took place on the ideological base of social partnership, meaning roughly a trade-off between social peace and the recognition of labour rights, as well as the consent of organized business to participate politically and financially (through taxes) in building an egalitarian welfare state. Once the opposition (the communist unions in France and Italy and, marginally, the radical left) had been disarmed, this pattern prevailed for the next 30 years.

However, this social reconstruction also took place in the context of the Cold War. Contrary to what is often assumed, the Cold War was not the only or even the principal reason for the 1947 split of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) that emerged at the end of the war. The radical opposition between democratic socialist and communist social and political objectives, which became irreconcilable with the emergence of Stalinism in the mid-1920s, would have sufficed to split the movement. The ongoing repression of socialist trade unionists and any other independent trade unionists in the countries under the control of the USSR confirmed and deepened this split. Of course, as is well documented, the US Central Intelligence Agency made its own destructive contribution, the effects of which have often been overstated by both supporters and opponents. We need not subscribe to the police theory of history which holds that history is shaped by conspiracies rather than by the movement of social forces.

The fact remains that for the 40 years or more that followed, the political life of the labour movement was dominated by a false debate: whether capitalism (partially managed by social democracy) or communism (in its Stalinist form) was best suited to workers' interests. There was also the argument that the huge propaganda machinery mobilized to line up the labour movement on either side of the vertical line separating the two blocs had largely succeeded in concealing the much more important horizontal line separating classes within the blocs.

The end of the Cold War coincided, broadly speaking, with the end of the postwar economic boom. Mass unemployment started appearing in the industrialized countries with the first "oil

shock” of 1974. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989 and the USSR was dissolved in 1991. In the period between the late 1970s and late 1980s, the labour movement in the industrialized countries, behind an impressive façade, continued its decline. This resulted in a diluted and trivialized ideological and political heritage, priorities distorted through the Cold War, still-powerful trade union organizations but with leaderships geared to administering gains of earlier struggles rather than organizing and engaging in new struggles, and generally unquestioning in their acceptance of the ideology of social partnership and bereft of political imagination; and a rank-and-file educated to bureaucratic routine and passivity.

The complacency and depoliticization of the labour movement in the postwar period had an important side effect: the decline of the labour NGOs.<sup>3</sup> The prewar labour movement was built on the assumption that all major social issues were its responsibility, and that its duty was to develop an adequate response to all of them. Specific aspects of the general struggle for a better world were normally taken up by a well structured socialist mass movement, which considered itself not only a political party, but also a counterculture to the existing society, and which created in its midst any organ or institution needed to take charge of any major social issue.<sup>4</sup> Typically this would include, alongside labour parties and trade unions, organizations to advocate and develop gender equality, consumers’ interests (the co-operative movement), popular health and welfare, housing, culture in all its aspects, education, leisure activities, and human rights (including anti-colonial movements).

In the postwar world, most of these institutions declined. In many countries they either disappeared or survived by narrowing their agendas and downsizing their ambitions. Ultimately, this was a consequence of the loss of a whole strata of ideologically committed and educated cadres, which contributed to the decline of the socialist mass parties into electoral machines, and to the loss of any broad political dimension in the trade unions. But underlying this decline was also an assumption that dealing with many of the broader social issues—seen earlier as an obligation of the labour movement—in the context of the postwar world, had

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<sup>3</sup> “Labour NGOs” are created by the labour movement to provide specialized services to its membership, for example Arbeiterwohlfahrt (Germany), Norsk Folkehjelp (Norway), War on Want (United Kingdom; development and social welfare), Friends of Nature (in several countries; leisure, environment protection), Arbeiterbund für Sport und Körperkultur (Austria; sports and leisure), Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (Sweden), and Workers’ Education Association (United Kingdom, Australia, Canada; education and culture). They are independently funded through membership dues and donations and, in the case of project administration, by public or semi-public grants. To organizations such as these, which are currently active and only a sampling of what is a vast social and cultural movement, must be added women’s and youth organizations, publishing houses, schools at all levels of education, research institutions, foundations, banks, housing, and consumers’ and production cooperatives in many countries (see footnote 4). Their international networks include the International Federation of Workers’ Education Associations, SOLIDAR, International Friends of Nature, Socialist International Women, and International Falcon Movement (youth). Together with the trade unions and labour parties they constitute the international labour movement, the accurate assessment of which, however, would have to include a long list of the flanking and auxiliary institutions that have been closed down or have declined into insignificance over the years. This loss has been only partially compensated by new or non-traditional labour NGOs, created in recent years by socialists and pro-labour activists, for example Culture et Liberté (France), Programa Laboral de Desarrollo (Peru), Labor, Education and Research Network (Philippines; education), Solidaritätsfonds für Befreiungskämpfe in der dritten Welt (Switzerland; international solidarity), Global Labour Institute (Switzerland), Labour and Society International (United Kingdom; research and advocacy), HomeNet (United Kingdom), and Women Working Worldwide (United Kingdom; organization and advocacy).

<sup>4</sup> This applies principally to Europe, in particular Northern and Central Europe, but also to Israel and, on a more modest scale, to parts of the labour movement in Australia, Canada, the United States and some countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

become a responsibility of the state. The labour movement had helped to build and was an active participant in the state, and therefore had developed a sense of ownership.

Of dubious value at the best of times, this assumption became obviously untenable as the state itself was challenged in the 1980s in its role as the keeper of social justice and welfare and started to downsize its commitments, under both left and right governments. Thus the withdrawal of the trade unions from a wide range of social concerns had actually fostered conditions for the emergence of issue-oriented groups without traditional ties to labour, which gradually filled the vacuum. In this sense the contemporary NGO movement may be regarded, at least in many of its parts, as the illegitimate child of the historical labour movement.

The globalization process of the world economy gained momentum in the 1980s and found the national and international levels of the trade union movement largely unprepared. The main features of globalization—revolutionary changes in communications and transport technologies and vastly increased capital mobility, in particular finance capital—need not be described here as they are familiar to all observers. So is the increase in number, size and power of TNCs, which at the same time have been the spearheads and chief beneficiaries of the technological changes underpinning globalization. As important as the geographical spread of TNCs has been the change in their structure through outsourcing. This has led to shrinkage of the “core” labour force in manufacturing and services and the growing casualization of production through a cascade of subcontractors, often ending with individual home workers.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, TNCs have immensely increased their power in two decades and mobility of capital is practically uncontrolled. Today, few TNCs depend on the domestic market of their country of origin and therefore no longer depend on consensual arrangements with the social and political forces rooted in the domestic market.

One political consequence, with major social implications, is the decline of the nation state, in the first place as an economic actor.

The state has declined as an employer through privatizations, which have not only increased the power of the transnationals as they buy up public assets, but which have also deprived the state of economic leverage and have therefore weakened its ability to influence economic policy and, in its role as an employer, labour policy.

The state has also declined in its role of economic policy regulator as a result of recent international trade arrangements that narrow the scope of democratic control over social and economic policies, transferring authority from democratically accountable governments and institutions to TNCs which are accountable only to their shareholders.

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<sup>5</sup> **States of Disarray: The Social Effects of Globalization**, UNRISD, March 1995; see also Dan Gallin, “Inside the new world order: Drawing the battle lines”, in *New Politics*, Vol. V, No. 1, 1994.

Finally, the growing inability of the state to control international capital flows has reduced its ability to tax capital<sup>6</sup> and has thus reduced, sometimes drastically, the fiscal income that provides the basis for public services and social programs. This further undermines the social consensus, which depends on its ability to protect the weak through redistribution.

Even more dangerously, the inability to control capital within national borders (through legislation or other political measures) carries with it a commensurate loss of influence of all institutions operating within the confines of those borders—national legislatures, political parties, national trade union centres—in other words, all instruments of democratic control where they existed in the first place.

The ideological reflection of these developments is what has been described as the New Policy Agenda or the Washington Consensus: “an expression of faith, that markets are efficient, that states are unnecessary, that the poor and rich have no conflicting interests, that things turn out for the best when left alone. It held that privatization and deregulation and open capital markets promote economic development, that governments should balance budgets and fight inflation and do almost nothing else.”<sup>7</sup>

Since most social-democratic governments subscribe, to a varying extent, to this position<sup>8</sup> trade unions have been left with diminishing support from their traditional political allies and from the state. The unravelling of the alliance between social-democratic and labour parties and the trade union movement has meant that the unions have lost many of their traditional contact points and anchors in civil society. The increased influence of organized business on the state (whatever the government in office) has meant that the state has become an increasingly weak and unreliable defender of the social rights, welfare and security achieved through labour struggles in earlier decades.

This is happening as the trade union movement is facing new and major challenges resulting from the emergence of a global labour market, the most important social consequence of globalization. A global labour market means that—because of the mobility of capital and fluidity of communications—workers in all countries, regardless of the degree of industrial development or social system, are competitively underbidding each other, with huge wage spreads between countries and regions in all areas of the economy.

This underbidding on a global scale has set in motion a relentless downward spiral of deteriorating wages and conditions through competitive deregulation and informalization of work. But, as the traditional “core” labour force shrinks in industrialized countries, there is no quid pro quo in terms of balanced social and economic development for the industrially underdeveloped countries of the “South” or the transition countries of the “East”, where

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Max Wilkinson, “They can run and they can hide”, in *Financial Times*, 14–15 August 1999.

<sup>7</sup> James K. Galbraith, “The crisis of globalization”, in *Dissent*, Summer 1999.

<sup>8</sup> See most notably Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder, “The way forward for European social-democrats”, press conference, London, 8 June 1999.

unemployment is a massive and growing problem and where wages remain below poverty level in most cases. One of the reasons has been the ability of transnational capital to impose conditions on states by the threat of relocation if its conditions are not met; another related and often underrated reason is state repression, which keeps in place the near slave-labour conditions that prevail at the bottom of the scale (for example in many of the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) or in countries such as China, Indonesia or Viet Nam).

The main point to keep in mind here is that the global labour market is not a “market” at all: ultimately it is not regulated by economic laws but by political laws. The Washington Consensus, which calls on the state to reduce its functions to the minimum, has nothing to say about massive state intervention in the form of military and police repression when it serves the interests of organized business.<sup>9</sup>

The decline in worldwide union density has been noted by many observers,<sup>10</sup> although it has been overstated. For example, most statistics on union membership before 1989 include the self-described unions of the Soviet bloc, which were in fact state institutions administering the labour force. Their collapse is no loss to the labour movement: it is a gain in so far as it opened the way for genuine trade unions, however weak they may be at this time. Also, it is a trend with many exceptions: in countries where the political context has been favourable to the labour movement, unions have either held their own or increased their membership (for example in Northern Europe, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Spain).

In the leading industrialized countries, however, union density has eroded, sometimes dramatically so. This is the case, for example, in France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States and is largely the by-product of globalization and the consequences described above: shrinkage of the traditional “core” labour force through production transfers, outsourcing and the casualization of work, that is the transfer of employment to an expanding unorganized informal sector, together with the growth of a service sector with weak trade union traditions.

The fact that the structure of the trade union movement has retained its territorial base in the nation state has not helped it in meeting these challenges. This structure accounts for its relative weakness at the international level. They are loose federations of national bodies accustomed to thinking and acting in national terms in a global context where the national framework is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Some of the larger international NGOs acting on environmental issues (such as Greenpeace) or human rights issues (such as Amnesty International) have been much quicker to respond and adjust to the conditions of a globalized world society.

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<sup>9</sup> A recent example is Nike in Indonesia, **Talks Fail, Troops Deployed, by Press for Change** (a consumer information organization reporting on workers’ rights in Asia), Campaign for Labor Rights, Washington, DC, 2 September 1999.

<sup>10</sup> **World Labour Report 1997–1998: Industrial Relations, Democracy and Social Stability**, International Labour Organization, November 1997.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the trade union movement remains the only democratically organized movement at the world level<sup>11</sup> that is defending, explicitly or implicitly, the vision of a society organized to serve the common welfare and based on the values of social justice, equality and co-operation. Its attachment to these values, as well as its resiliency in the face of adversity, derives from its membership. In recent decades, it has become politically isolated and substantively weakened. To regain lost ground, the trade union movement must globalize: to meet TNCs on their own terrain, to organize the informal sector, and to multiply and deepen roots in civil society to advance the vision of an alternative social order as part of a broad popular movement for progressive change (or, indeed, as the driving force in such a movement). These are the three main areas where the trade union movement must progress to put forward a credible, effective alternative to the Washington Consensus. The movement cannot advance in these areas without co-operating with the appropriate NGOs.

## **The World of NGOs**

All literature on NGOs stresses their great number and diversity. According to the *Yearbook of International Organizations*, the total number of internationally recognized NGOs is now well over 16,000.<sup>12</sup> In the United Kingdom there are estimated to be over 500,000 NGOs, of which 175,000 are legally registered charities. The Canadian Environmental Network of NGOs has a membership of 2,000 groups. Zimbabwe has an estimated 800 NGOs. In Bangladesh there are at least 12,000 local groups receiving local and central government financial support. In India, one estimate refers to 100,000 NGOs, while another claims 25,000 registered grassroots organizations in Tamil Nadu alone. Kenya has 23,000 women's organizations. Uganda has over 1,000 local NGOs and over 20 foreign-based ones. More than half of Australia's welfare services are supplied by an estimated 11,000 not-for-profit charitable organizations.<sup>13</sup>

In 1997, 1,356 organizations had consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council<sup>14</sup> and in 1998, 892 "development NGOs" were members of the national platforms in the 15 EU countries.<sup>15</sup>

The difficulty of coming to grips with the complex NGO world is illustrated by the different attempts to establish categories. A study by the Commonwealth Foundation found 31 different organizational forms of NGOs and is not an exhaustive list.<sup>16</sup> NGOs can be categorized by their

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<sup>11</sup> There were 164 million trade union members in 1995 (ILO World Labour Report). Of these, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) (213 affiliated organizations in 143 countries) accounts for around 124 million. The remainder are distributed among the WCL (approximately 3 million), what remains of the WFTU, and organizations with regional or no international affiliation. Total International Trade Secretariat (ITS) membership, largely but not totally overlapping with the ICFTU, approximates 130 million.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Peter Schwartz and Blair Gibb, *When Good Companies Do Bad Things*, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999, p. 132.

<sup>13</sup> Colin Ball and Leith Dunn, *Non-Governmental Organisations: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice*, The Commonwealth Foundation, London, 1995, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Carolina Ortega Barrales, *The Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Public Procedures of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights*, Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales, Geneva, 1998, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> *NGO Handbook*, Liaison Committee of Development NGOs in the European Union, Brussels, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Ball and Dunn, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

degree of independence or, on the contrary, of control by outside bodies that are not NGOs (governments, businesses, political groups or funders); by their function (typically, development and humanitarian aid, human rights, education, women's issues, environmental issues); or by their geographic location ("North" and "South"). Finally, there are international NGO networks and federations, as well as large NGOs, operating on a global scale with national sections in different countries (typically, Amnesty International). A study on behalf of the General Conference of International Trade Secretariats (ITSs),<sup>17</sup> summarizing ITSs' experiences with NGOs, establishes 12 categories and remarks that "inevitably, there are overlaps".<sup>18</sup>

The possibilities of and obstacles to co-operation between trade unions and NGOs do not in fact depend on size, structure, organizational form, or even function of the NGO. Some NGOs work on several issues at once, and many issues are connected (it is difficult to promote sustainable development without at the same time seeking to advance human rights, education, equality or environment issues).

Co-operation between trade unions and NGOs depends far more on whether they share common objectives, and on issues relating to their methods of operation (legitimacy, transparency, accountability, management). In any event, general statements about union and NGO relations are difficult. Even though unions have far more basic common features than NGOs do, they are by no means a homogenous whole: there are obvious differences due, for example, to political tradition or organizational culture. Co-operation therefore always depends on a specific convergence of objectives and on a compatibility of approach and *modus operandi* between specific partners.

## Shared Objectives and Co-operation

Although primarily concerned with conditions of employment and the workplace, trade unions have always had broader social and political concerns, which they have expressed through political commitments, views and programs over a wide range of national and international issues. These include in particular: human rights, development, education, women's rights and equality, and environmental protection. It is on these particular issues that co-operation between unions and NGOs has developed. Instances of such co-operation are described in this paper.

On some of these issues, unions have allowed a gap to develop between theory and practice by withdrawing into what they regard as their "core business" and neglecting broader issues perceived as subsidiary or as someone else's concern. This has happened partly because of a decline in political capacity and competence, and partly because of the perception that a

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<sup>17</sup> ITSs are independent international trade union federations organized by industry or branches of economic activity (transport, metals, chemicals/energy/mining, food/agriculture/catering, public service, building/wood, etc.). There are 14 ITSs and they are associated with the ICFTU. They meet twice a year in a General Conference. The ITSs' General Conference has no constitution and decisions are made by consensus. It does, however, elect its own Chair (on a rotation principle) and ITS representatives on ICFTU committees. All ITSs are invited to attend the ICFTU Executive Board meetings, where they have a voice but no vote.

<sup>18</sup> Bob Harris and Alan Leather, *ITS-NGO Relations*, Geneva/Ferney-Voltaire, June 1999.

division of tasks existed in the labour movement and that specialized agencies would take care of single issues. But, as noted above, these specialized agencies had lost much of their capacity for advocacy in the postwar period.

At the same time, changes in society under the impact of globalization have led to explosive growth in the NGO sector and have brought NGOs “more and more into the arena of societal governance and advancement”.<sup>19</sup> All social and political issues that have traditionally been the concern of the labour movement—not excluding “core” trade union issues such as employment, working conditions and wage levels—are now also concerns of a multitude of local and international NGOs.

### ***Human rights and workers’ rights***

Because they are rooted in the democratic revolutions of the nineteenth century, trade unions have always identified with the struggle for human rights. Apart from historical reasons of principle, trade unions (in contrast with other important social actors such as churches or businesses) cannot function in an environment where human and democratic rights are not safeguarded—for example in highly repressive military dictatorships or police states (except in the form of illegal cadre groups, or proto-unions). As clandestine organizations when necessary and open ones when possible, trade unions have been at the forefront of most of the critical battles for democracy, including those in recent history—such as in Brazil, China, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the Republic of Korea, South Africa and Spain.

In addition, practically all basic trade union concerns are in fact human rights issues, starting with the most elementary: the right to exist. Restriction of the right to organize and the right to strike, which are included in the right to bargain collectively, is an infringement of fundamental human rights specified in several UN human rights instruments and in international labour standards.<sup>20</sup>

Consequently, there has been extensive co-operation between unions and human rights NGOs, particularly at the international level. For example, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and most ITSs are working with Amnesty International, either on a sporadic, case-by-case basis or in a continuous relationship, in the defence of workers’ rights against state or para-state repression. The main form of co-operation is information exchange on specific cases of human and trade union rights violations. Amnesty International conducts thorough research to verify claims of human rights violations. This is an important basis for the credibility of its campaigns and ITSs have access to the research results. Reciprocally, information provided by the ITSs is fed into the Amnesty International verification process and specific cases affecting trade unionists can become Amnesty International campaigns.

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<sup>19</sup> Ball and Dunn, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 19, 20 and 23(4) (respectively: the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the freedom of peaceful assembly and association; and the right to form and join trade unions); United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 22 on the freedom of association with others and Article 21 on the right to peaceful assembly); United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 8, on the right to form trade unions and to strike). The principal international labour standards protecting trade union rights are ILO conventions on Freedom of Association (No. 87), Collective Bargaining (No. 98) and Workers’ Representatives (No. 135).



From 1979 to 1985, Amnesty International played a key supportive role in an International Union of Food, Agriculture, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF)<sup>21</sup> campaign to protect a union, representing workers at a Coca-Cola bottling franchise in Guatemala, from extinction through terror, including assassination of the union's leadership.<sup>22</sup> This campaign took place in two stages (1979–1981 and 1984–1985) and, in a report to IUF affiliates on the first stage in 1981, the IUF General Secretary commented:

Extremely important for the success of the campaign was that the IUF worked in coalition with other organizations, such as church groups [Interfaith Council on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR),<sup>23</sup> the American Friends Service Committee] and Amnesty International. It was this co-ordinated action and communication which added to the pressure against the company and also provided quick communication on events within Guatemala. These groups provided most of the contacts within the country and to the [Coca-Cola] workers themselves. The IUF was often able to mobilize affiliates quickly after an event because of this direct communication of information.<sup>24</sup>

Co-operation between ITSs and human rights NGOs also takes place on specific issues or human rights violations. The International Federation of Journalists co-operates with Amnesty International and other human rights organizations on freedom of the press and the defence of journalists. The IUF and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) are working with NGOs such as End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism in the tourist industry. The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF)<sup>25</sup> has co-operated with the Anti-Slavery Society on bonded labour and with various NGOs on child labour. Education International (EI) and its national affiliates (teachers' unions) co-operated with NGOs on the global march against child labour, and on preparations for the World March of Women in 2000.

Under dictatorship trade unions face high levels of state repression or are forced underground and it is frequently church-based NGOs that provide a foundation for the organization and defence of workers. There are examples of this in Indonesia today, the Philippines under Marcos, Poland from 1976 to 1981 with the Workers' Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników (KOR)), the Republic of Korea in the late 1980s, and South Africa in the early 1970s. Under Nigeria's recent military dictatorship, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM)<sup>26</sup> worked with human rights NGOs to campaign for the release of imprisoned trade unionists.

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<sup>21</sup> The IUF is the ITS for food, agricultural, catering and tobacco workers.

<sup>22</sup> Mike Gatehouse and Miguel Angel Reyes, **Soft Drink, Hard Labour**, Latin America Bureau (Research and Action) Ltd., London, June 1987.

<sup>23</sup> The ICCR is an agency established by the US National Council of Churches to monitor the conduct of companies and organized business.

<sup>24</sup> **The Coca-Cola Guatemala Campaign 1979–1981**, IUF, Geneva, 1981; and press clippings.

<sup>25</sup> The ITGLWF is the ITS for the textile and garment industry.

<sup>26</sup> The ICEM is the ITS for workers in the chemical, paper, glass and ceramics, petroleum, nuclear energy, and coal mining industries.

In most of these cases, the NGOs and the workers seeking to establish free trade unions had to face not only a repressive state, but also national trade union organizations under state control. When these national organizations became members of international federations, they succeeded in some cases (Indonesia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea) in weakening or delaying solidarity action by the international trade union movement.

NGO/union alliances have also played an important role in organizing workers in regions or employment sectors with traditionally low levels of trade union organization. Most importantly, this includes rural and agricultural workers and subsistence farmers—the majority of the global labour force. For example, the IUF is a member of the European Banana Action Network, a coalition of unions and NGOs working on the banana trade issue.

The ITGLWF participates in the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), a coalition started in the Netherlands in 1990 with the objective of improving working conditions in the garment industry worldwide. It includes trade unions, consumer organizations, women's groups, solidarity organizations, development organizations, world shops and a range of NGOs. Since 1995, the CCC has expanded to other European countries. Similar campaigns, working with the CCC, exist in Australia, Canada and the United States.

The CCC initially focused on Asia and has more recently become active in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. The organizations involved in the different national CCCs are trade unions and NGOs with partner organizations in garment-producing countries. The CCC organizes support for workers in a conflict situation, and also has a small strike fund. Furthermore, the campaign aims to improve the situation of home workers and people working in sweatshops in Western Europe, often through lobbying governments to improve legislation.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Development***

Because of their perceived obligation to advance a broader social and political agenda, trade unions in industrialized countries have engaged in development activities at national and international levels. In most cases the activities focus on trade union development through education and organizing programs.

The programs are conducted through international trade union organizations (such as ITSs), and are in general supported by public development funds when national trade union federations (or centres) have access to such funds—as in Canada, Japan, the United States and most countries in Western Europe. Some national centres conduct activities directly through their international departments—for example, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO Norway) or Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV, Netherlands), while others have created specialized agencies for this purpose—for example the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO Sweden)/Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO) or Council for International Co-operation in Sweden, the Danish Confederation of Trade Unions

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<sup>27</sup> Janneke van Eijk and Ineke Zeldenrust, **Monitoring Working Conditions in the Garment and Sportswear Industry**, Stichting Oenderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen, Amsterdam, September 1997.

(LO Denmark)/Salaried Employees and Civil Servants Confederation (FTF) in Denmark, the Trade Union Solidarity Center of Finland, the Instituto Sindical de Cooperación al Desarrollo of the Union General de Trabajadores in Spain, the American Center for International Labor Solidarity of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) or the Japan International Labour Foundation.

Some large national trade union organizations (for example the union of workers in local government, health, gas, electricity, water, transport and higher education, called UNISON, in the United Kingdom, the Danish General Workers' Union (SiD), Bondgenoten FNV in the Netherlands) conduct similar programs on a bilateral basis.

In some EU countries trade union organizations are members of the national development NGO platforms (such as SiD and LO Denmark/FTF, the Metal Workers' Union and the Municipal Workers' Union in Finland, and the Commonwealth Trade Union Council in the United Kingdom).<sup>28</sup>

In Canada, four unions have created their own NGOs in support of their development work, which ranges from humanitarian to trade union solidarity and human rights activities. They are the National Automobile, Aerospace, Transportation and General Workers' Union of Canada's Social Justice Fund; the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers' Union's Humanity Fund; the Canadian Union of Public Employees' Union Aid; and the Steelworkers' Humanities Fund.

In addition to trade unions, labour movement NGOs also conduct development activities. Some of these groups have become more active at the international level and perceive it as a priority to assist the trade union movement in dealing with the challenges of globalization. The development and social welfare NGOs linked to social-democratic parties and the trade union movement, for example, are internationally organized in the network of the international federation of welfare and solidarity organizations of the socialist labour movement—formerly known as International Workers' Aid and now called SOLIDAR—consisting of 21 organizations in 15 countries and one affiliated international organization.

SOLIDAR is conducting a joint lobbying campaign with the ICFTU at the World Trade Organization (WTO) on the theme "workers' rights are human rights", for the inclusion of core labour standards in international trade agreements (so-called "social clauses"). However, campaigning at the WTO has proved to be a major point of conflict between the labour movement and some NGO coalitions, such as the Third World Network. This illustrates some of the broader political and cultural hurdles yet to be overcome.

The International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development has been established in Geneva to bring together the main environmental and development NGOs working to influence the WTO. Funding has been provided by Oxfam and Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Ontwikkelings-samenwerking (NOVIB), Christian Aid, German and US church

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<sup>28</sup> **NGO Handbook**, Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the European Union, Brussels, 1998.

groups, US foundations (Ford, MacArthur), the EU and aid agencies in Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. It is open to co-operation with trade unions and it is likely that such co-operation will develop with ITSs in particular.

The German political foundations are a special case in so far as they are entitled to public funding in proportion to the percentage of national legislative election votes obtained by the parties to which they are connected. The social-democratic Friedrich Ebert Stiftung has the closest links with the trade union movement and conducts an extensive trade union development program at the international level, both bilaterally and through ITSs, as well as programs supporting co-operatives, political groups and local NGOs. Its Christian-democratic counterpart, the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, also sponsors trade union programs, as do some of the smaller foundations.

The Olof Palme International Center (OPIC) is a labour NGO founded in Sweden in 1992 by the Social-Democratic Party, LO Sweden and the Co-operative Movement to "co-ordinate, develop and strengthen the labour movements' interest and involvement in international issues." Thirty-four political, cultural, co-operative and union organizations in Sweden are now affiliated with the OPIC.

In summary, the trade union movement, especially in the more advanced industrialized countries, conducts extensive development activities, both on a bilateral basis and through its international organizations, concentrating mostly on institution building: trade union development and assistance to people's organizations in developing countries. Despite their considerable scope, these activities do not in general constitute contact points with non-labour NGOs. In this field, unions have in general either acted directly on their own behalf or they have worked with labour NGOs, partly created for that purpose.

Discussions on development policies and strategies have taken place within the labour movement. They have focused on issues such as bilateralism and multilateralism (with the attendant issue of accountability) and on the choice of priorities (assistance in the spirit of humanitarian aid or concentrating on institution building aimed at changing power relationships in society).

There are, however, some instances of co-operation with non-labour NGOs. For example, a number of ITSs co-operate with Oxfam International (OI), a coalition of 11 development NGOs. Several ITSs have co-operated in the past with national affiliates such as Oxfam GB and NOVIB. EI and OI worked together in pushing for debt relief for education during the G-8 summit in Cologne in June 1999. At the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) annual meeting held in Washington in autumn 1999, EI and OI focused on the impact of adjustment policies on education. EI also works with ActionAid, a UK-based development NGO, on an international campaign to improve public education. In 21 Southern countries and in four European

countries, this campaign is supported by religious groups, human rights organizations, teachers' unions, women's associations and a range of national and international NGOs.<sup>29</sup>

NGOs rarely organize activities in partnership with trade unions. One successful instance was the creation of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU), the independent trade union centre in Hong Kong, which originates in a joint trade union organizing project between the IUF and the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee (HKCIC). The project, which was funded by the LO Sweden/TCO, started in 1983 and led to the creation, in 1984, of the IUF Hong Kong Education Office, later to become the Hong Kong Trade Union Education Centre, a joint operation of the HKCIC and several ITSs. This in turn led to the establishment of the HKCTU in August 1990. The HKCTU now has approximately 140,000 members and is the second largest trade union centre in Hong Kong.

### **Education**

In the field of education, trade unions have generally preferred to work on their own or through labour NGOs. The international organization of the educational labour NGOs, the International Federation of Workers' Education Associations (IFWEA), was founded in 1947 and has 75 organizations in 51 countries and six affiliated international organizations. Its national affiliates include specialized education NGOs linked to the labour movement, trade unions (often through their education departments), educational institutions of social-democratic parties, think tanks and research institutes. The international affiliates are SOLIDAR (a reciprocal affiliation: IFWEA is also a member of SOLIDAR), four ITSs and a Latin American regional adult education body.

In 1993, the IFWEA mission statement was revised to stress its common purpose with other labour movement organizations.<sup>30</sup> Following a policy decision at its 1996 General Conference to "strengthen the global organizing capacity of the labour movement", the IFWEA developed the International Study Circle (ISC) project, which aims to facilitate an international education program on globalization issues.

An ISC involves bringing together groups of participants based in several countries (local study circles), via the Internet, who work simultaneously according to a common curriculum, set of materials and educational method. Each local study circle has a facilitator. Between meetings, each group has access to materials on the Internet, including the results of discussions and work completed by other countries in previous sessions.

Two pilot courses, focusing on TNCs and involving 12 countries, were conducted in 1997 and 1998. In 1999, the IFWEA conducted two ISCs in partnership with the IUF and the International

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<sup>29</sup> Education International (EI Quarterly), Vol. 5, No. 3, October 1999, pp. 18-19.

<sup>30</sup> "As an integral part of the labour movement, workers' education works for a society based on social justice. ... The IFWEA and its member organizations will contribute with their programs to organize the struggle against social injustice, poverty and discrimination, in close alliance with political parties, trade unions, the women's movement, cooperatives, youth organizations and other social organizations inspired by the ideas of democratic socialism. Whenever possible, it will assist such organizations in strengthening their ideological and political base and in training their members." IFWEA Charter, Chapter 10.

Metal Workers' Federation, both on specific transnational companies. The objective of the ITSs and IFWEA is that the network created in companies through the ISC, linking local unions in different countries, should remain as a permanent international union structure after the ISC has run its course. In this way, ISCs help "strengthen the global organizing capacity of the labour movement" as applied to TNCs. Of course, ISCs can be used by almost any group as a method to establish international networks and, indeed, the IFWEA has started a third ISC on the global food industry for women from trade unions, community organizations and NGOs.<sup>31</sup>

At the national level, there is regular co-operation between most non-union IFWEA members (independent but labour-linked educational institutions) and trade unions. This can take the form of provision of services (for example, the Labor Education and Research Network in the Philippines conducts training courses for the Alliance of Progressive Labour and some of its member unions) or of joint education and organizing programs (such as the local organization of the Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund and trade unions in Sweden, which conducts joint programs in the Baltic States, and Central and Eastern Europe).

In some instances non-labour funding agencies have supported labour service and education NGOs (including members of the IFWEA) that have been or still are in opposition to the official trade union movement in their countries. This has often been the case when the trade union movement has been state dominated and the NGOs were vehicles for promoting an alternative labour movement. The cases of Indonesia, the Republic of Korea and the Philippines have been mentioned. A current case is the support given by NOVIB to the Center for Trade Union and Workers' Services in Egypt (an IFWEA affiliate). This kind of situation could in theory lead to friction between the funding NGO and the trade union movement. In practice it occurs only at the local level in the country concerned, because most international trade union organizations and unions in democratic countries look askance at state-dominated trade unions and are sympathetic to alternatives.

There does not appear to be extensive co-operation between unions and non-labour NGOs in the field of education. However, it does exist in several countries where unions and academic institutions jointly conduct labour training programs. In the United States, programs at universities such as Cornell, Harvard, Michigan State, Rutgers, the University of California in Los Angeles, and Yale are well established and supported by the trade union movement. These programs have a national umbrella organization, the University and College Labor Education Association, which is an affiliate of the IFWEA. Comparable relations between academic institutions and the trade union movement exist in some Western European countries, as well.

### ***Women's rights and equality issues***

The relationship between trade unions and the women's movement has been complex and contradictory. Since their beginnings, trade unions have championed women's rights and many women have been charismatic leaders throughout the history of the labour movement. Some

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<sup>31</sup> **Responding to the Global Economy, International Study Circle Pilot Programme: Final Evaluation Report**, IFWEA/Euro-WEA/WEA (United Kingdom), London, March 1999.

examples are Flora Tristan Moscoso, active in France and Peru and author of a pioneering plea for a general international workers' union called *L'Union ouvrière*; Louise Michel, a leader of the Paris Commune; Clara Eissner Zetkin, a leader of the German socialist women's movement and the first General Secretary of the ITGLWF; Maria Jones ("Mother Jones"), a legendary organizer of American mine workers and a founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW);<sup>32</sup> Federica Montseny, a leader of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo (CNT)<sup>33</sup> during the Spanish Civil War and while in exile; Marie Nielsen, a teacher and a leader of the Danish left before the Second World War; Margarethe Faas, a secretary and organizer of the Swiss Federation of Trade Unions, and an editor of *L'Exploitée/Die Vorkämpferin* in the 1910s—to name only a few.

At the same time, the trade union movement has also been dominated by the culture of the male industrial worker—with the exception of the textile and garment industries. The industrial culture was not friendly to women. In several countries women had to create their own unions because they were not welcome in the existing trade union movement. The only union of this type still existing is the Danish Women Workers' Union, established in the early 1900s because the General Workers' Union refused to admit women members.

Faced with increasing pressure from the women's movement over the last three decades and with the fact that women represent a growing share of the labour force, unions have undertaken serious efforts in many countries to open trade unions to women. This has meant introducing affirmative action programs within the union structures, moving women's demands to the top of the bargaining agenda and changing the prevailing culture, customs and practices of the organization to make it friendlier to women. Despite significant and continuing, albeit slow, progress, much of the trade union movement remains male dominated and a legitimate target for criticism by women's rights groups.

In the last 10 years or so, explosive growth of the informal sector has underscored the necessity for the trade union movement to organize not only women workers, but women workers who are for the most part not in regular, permanent employment. The informal sector has grown for two principal reasons: the worldwide economic crisis, and changes in the organization of work.

The debt crisis of the developing countries,<sup>34</sup> dismantling of the public sector, deregulation of the labour market under the structural adjustment programs of the IMF and the World Bank, and the global crisis that started in Asia in 1997, continued in Russia in 1998 and hit Brazil at the beginning of 1999, have pushed millions of people out of formal employment and into the

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<sup>32</sup> The IWW is a revolutionary syndicalist trade union federation founded in the United States in 1905. In 1917 it had close to 200,000 members in the United States. At different times in its history, it has had branches in Australia, Britain, Canada, Chile, Germany, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway and South Africa.

<sup>33</sup> The CNT was the leading trade union confederation in Spain before the Civil War, with 1 million members in 1936. The CNT was anarcho-syndicalist and strongest in the regions of Andalusia and Catalonia.

<sup>34</sup> The term "developing countries" is used here for convenience; however, it is inaccurate because it conveys a false sense of social and economic progress. Most of the countries covered by this term are in fact declining in terms of living standards and economic strength.

informal sector. According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) report,<sup>35</sup> the current crisis took a toll of 24 million jobs in East Asia alone, mostly in the “modern industrial sector”. In Russia and the newly independent successor states to the USSR, in addition to millions of unemployed workers, there are millions still in formal employment who are not paid for months at a time. In the absence of any serious social safety nets their only possibility of survival is the informal sector.

The other factor contributing to informal sector growth during the last two decades has been the changing structure of the transnational enterprise. The modern enterprise is essentially an organizer of production carried out on its behalf by others. The central focus includes a corporate headquarters for management and employees, and possibly a core labour force of highly skilled technicians. Headquarters directs production and sales, controls subcontracting, decides at short notice what will be produced where, when, how and by whom, and where certain markets will be supplied from. Production of the goods it sells, and in any case all labour-intensive operations, will be subcontracted, perhaps internationally. This type of company will be the co-ordinator of cascading subcontracting operations that will not be part of its formal structure but will nevertheless be wholly dependent on it, with wages and conditions deteriorating when moving from the centre of operations to the periphery.

The decline of trade union density in most industrialized countries in the 1980s and 1990s is due less to transfers of production and relocations in the South and East than has often been assumed: more important has been the deconstruction of the formal sector and the deregulation of the labour market in the heartlands of industrial trade unionism. With the informal sector representing a majority of the labour force in the developing countries, and a significant and growing proportion in industrialized countries, it is impossible today to conceive of organizing a majority of workers on a global scale without serious organizing in the informal sector.

For the most part, informal sector workers are women; and the majority of workers expelled from the formal sector by the global economic crisis are women. As the ICFTU has reported,<sup>36</sup> women are the principal victims of the casualization of labour and the pauperization created by the crisis and have thus entered the informal sector en masse in the last two years. According to a survey by the Friends of Women Foundation in Thailand,<sup>37</sup> the mass layoffs in 1998 took place mostly in the textiles and electronics industries, where 90 per cent of workers are women. In Moscow, two thirds of the jobless are women.

Even before the crisis, women constituted most of the informal labour force (child labour is also strongly represented). Home workers are almost exclusively women—and in Latin America and Asia home work represents as much as 40–50 per cent of labour in key export sectors such as garments, footwear and electronics. Women are also the great majority of street vendors in informal markets, representing up to 30 per cent of the urban labour force in certain African countries.

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<sup>35</sup> **The Asian Financial Crisis: The Challenge for Social Policy**, ILO, November 1998.

<sup>36</sup> **From Asia to Brazil to Russia: The Cost of the Crisis**, ICFTU, May 1999.

<sup>37</sup> “Women Workers Hit Hard”, **Bangkok Post**, 12 December 1998, quoted in **ICFTU Trade Union World**, May 1999.



Ninety per cent of the workers in the 850 EPZs around the world are women—and in the majority of cases workers' rights and social protection are non-existent in EPZs. Although they work in factories, what EPZ workers have in common with informal sector workers is that they are unprotected, largely unorganized, female labour.

In this context, unions have increasingly entered partnerships with women's NGOs, organizing drives and forming alliances to represent informal workers' interests.

At the EU level, the European Homeworking Group is a coalition of unions, NGOs, church organizations and researchers involved with home workers. The work of this group was a factor influencing the majority of European governments to support the ILO Home Workers' Convention until it was successfully passed in 1996.

In the United Kingdom, there are a number of local projects involving NGOs or local authorities, as well as a national campaigning organization, the National Group on Homeworking. This group has led the campaign for home workers to be included in the national minimum wage and has been a major influence on government policy, public awareness and trade union policy on home work.

In the Central American EPZs and the Mexican *maquilas*, organizing women workers has come about mainly as a result of work by women's NGOs that have always supported unionization of women workers, sometimes, as in Mexico, against established unions.<sup>38</sup> The EPZ union Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de la Zona Franca, in the Dominican Republic, created neighbourhood women's committees uniting female union members with non-members for the purpose of awareness raising, mutual support and organizing. In Guatemala, a union successfully worked with women's groups to submit a bill on sexual harassment to the national legislature. In Peru, unions have worked with a socialist feminist NGO, Flora Tristan, to develop education and organize programs for their female members. In Ghana, there has been a joint union/NGO initiative on the succession law, so as to protect women's rights and guarantee them a share of the husband's estate. There are other examples of such co-operation.<sup>39</sup>

Informal sector workers, in particular women, have also organized new trade unions specifically for raising awareness and support. An early case, and an example to many, is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which started 25 years ago with a few hundred people and now has 210,000 members in four Indian states. SEWA organizes home workers, street vendors, paper pickers and refuse collectors, harvesters of forest products, etc. It has an infrastructure of flanking services: a bank providing micro credit; a vocational and trade union training program at different levels; producers' co-operatives (artisans, agricultural producers); and service co-operatives (health, housing). In South Africa, the Self-Employed Women's Union (SEWU), a Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) affiliate, has

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<sup>38</sup> Marleen van Ruyven, "The Factor 'X' in Organizing Women Workers", in *News from IRENE*, April 1998.

<sup>39</sup> *Trade Unions and the Informal Sector: Towards a Comprehensive Strategy*, ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities, July 1999, pp. 50-51.

been organized along the same lines. Attempts to establish similar organizations have been reported from other countries as well.

Home workers' and street vendors' organizations have formed international networks. One is the International Alliance of Street Vendors, or StreetNet, which includes organizations or support groups in 11 countries. It was founded in 1995 and adopted the Declaration of Bellagio on the rights of street vendors. HomeNet is a second network, representing home workers and comprising unions such as SEWA, SEWU and the Embroiderer's Union of Madeira, as well as other associations of home workers in Bangladesh, the Philippines, and Thailand.

HomeNet and StreetNet, together with SEWA, and a range of unions and support groups at universities and in international organizations, have formed another international network: Women in Informal Employment Globalizing and Organizing, which seeks to work at different levels: research, policy proposals and coalition building.

Organizing unprotected women workers in the informal sector and in EPZs takes place at an intersection of trade union and NGO concerns where many opportunities for co-operation exist and where such co-operation is likely to considerably advance the agenda of all parties involved, not least that of the main beneficiaries of such co-operation: exploited women workers on the margins of the global economy.

### ***Environment***

The cultural and social concerns of the early labour movement included a strong element of revolt against the degrading living conditions imposed on the urban working class by capitalist industrialization. Urban slums were breeding grounds of disease and a variety of social evils, and the labour movement made it a priority to instill in its constituency a capacity to protect moral and physical integrity through organization. The workers' temperance movement, labour health services, and socialist urbanism with its emphasis on access to light and air, reflected such concerns.

Organizations such as the International Friends of Nature (IFN) were formed to enable workers to spend their leisure time in a healthy natural environment. The IFN was founded in 1895 in Vienna, where its secretariat is still located, and now has 20 national affiliated or associated organizations with a total membership of 600,000, mostly in Europe (nearly half in Austria and Germany) but also in Australia, Israel, Mexico, Nepal and the United States (California). One aim of the IFN is to "protect nature and the countryside and contribute to the protection of the natural living area".<sup>40</sup> It is one of the labour NGOs showing renewed signs of activity. In Germany, the IFN considers itself as a "bridge between trade unions, social organizations and the environmental movement" and has joint environment protection projects with unions such as Industriegewerkschaft Medien and Industriegewerkschaft Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> **Statutes of the International Friends of Nature**, Article 5: Aims of the IFN, IFN, n.d.

<sup>41</sup> **Vorwärts**, SPD Monthly, Berlin, April 1999.

Following the Second World War, reconstruction was regarded as an overriding priority in Europe and productivist attitudes prevailed over environmental concerns and in the social-democratic labour movement. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, the industrial development of the USSR and the countries under its control, as well as that of China and the Republic of Korea, uncensored by public opinion and driven by the need of the ruling bureaucracy for self-aggrandizement and power, provided an extreme example of productivism with catastrophic environmental consequences.

When the modern movement for environmental protection arose in the 1960s, its relations with the labour movement were ambivalent, as the concerns of trade unions had shifted to protecting jobs and, in the short term, ecological movements were seen by many unions as threatening employment. In some instances, conflicts developed between unions and conservationist organizations (as in the forest industry in the Pacific Northwest of the United States; the Norwegian whaling industry; or the tobacco industry, where unions supported companies for many years in their resistance to anti-smoking campaigns).

In recent years, an awareness of the need for long-term sustainable development has spread in the labour movement, as it has in the general population, leading to new forms of co-operation between unions and environmental NGOs. Unions have also observed the capacity of environmental NGOs to bring powerful TNCs to the bargaining table by mobilizing public opinion, and have begun to view them as potential allies.

There are several recent examples of co-operation at the international level, between ITSs and environmental organizations.

In June 1999, the International Federation of Building and Wood Workers (IFBWW)<sup>42</sup> and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) agreed to co-operate on forest issues, notably eco-labelling guidelines.<sup>43</sup> Both organizations agreed that the environmental and social aspects of forestry were inextricably linked and that co-operation was needed to combat the rapid deforestation and forest degradation occurring in many parts of the world. The eco-labelling guidelines, to be worked out jointly, will require that all timber and non-timber forest products originate from certified forests, well-managed in the ecological, economic and social aspects. Central to the agreement is the principle that forest certification should be independent, transparent and the result of a “multistakeholder process”, truly representing ecological, economic and social interests, in contrast to other eco-labelling schemes led primarily by private forest owners.

In another example, the ITF and International Metal Worker’s Federation are supporting a Greenpeace campaign against the scrapping of contaminated ships in Asia, particularly in India. Some ships are contaminated with high levels of toxic and hazardous materials, including heavy metals and asbestos. The two ITSs point out that offshore scrapping pollutes the environment and endangers the health of the workers involved; ships scrapped in Asia

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<sup>42</sup> The IFBWW is the ITS of construction, timber and wood industry workers.

<sup>43</sup> **IFBWW Press Release**, 23 June 1999.

should be free of substances such as asbestos, lead, other heavy metal compounds, oily wastes and polychlorinated biphenyls. Ship owners should be responsible for rendering ships non-hazardous before breaking them up. There must be adequate safeguards for the environment and nearby communities. Shipbreaking workers should enjoy significantly improved health and safety conditions.<sup>44</sup>

The IUF works with the Pesticide Action Network and its regional bodies, as well as with the Brazil-based Grupo Interdisciplinario de Pesquisa e Acção em Agricultura e Saúde, on pesticides. In September 1998, in response to the situation relating to genetically modified food, problems caused by the use of pesticides and concerns about sustainable agriculture, the Latin American Regional Organization of the IUF initiated BioMater, a joint project involving trade unions, peasant organizations and NGOs aimed at preserving, producing and distributing seeds. BioMater has established a bank for organic seeds that will be registered in most Latin American countries.<sup>45</sup>

The ICEM has worked with Greenpeace on an agreement with the chemical industry on chlorine. Greenpeace, as well as other NGOs and indigenous defence groups, have supported ICEM's campaign against Rio Tinto Zinc, a leading mining company accused of conducting operations in socially and environmentally unacceptable conditions.

At the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)<sup>46</sup> in New York, the ICFTU has developed a leading role in securing recognition for trade union views, in co-operation with several ITSs (ICEM, ITF, IUF, Public Service International), the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and union representatives from Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ghana, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United States. The union position on joint participatory approaches to target setting and monitoring and the role of eco-audits was supported by the NGOs present.<sup>47</sup>

Co-operation has developed between national and international trade union organizations and environmental NGOs on a broad front and is likely to grow. Whether it will develop faster and in greater depth than co-operation between NGOs and organized business and with individual companies, remains to be seen.

### ***Corporate accountability***

The effects of globalization have often made it difficult for trade unions to achieve their objectives through the traditional methods of industrial action. With globalization, the ability to mobilize public opinion has proved increasingly effective as a means of pressuring companies.

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<sup>44</sup> ITF News, No. 2, 1999, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Report on Activities to the IUF Executive Committee, IUF, Geneva, 1998 and 1999.

<sup>46</sup> The CSD was established after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, to ensure an effective follow-up of the Rio Earth Summit. The CSD meets every year in New York for two weeks. It is a forum for governments, businesses, NGOs, trade unions and international agencies. There are currently 53 CSD member countries.

<sup>47</sup> CSD Newsletter '98, Vol. 1, June 1998, published by Trade Unions Network on Sustainable Development and Working Group of Social Sustainability/CSD.

NGOs, more than trade unions, have demonstrated an ability to act on public opinion in this context and, consequently, companies and NGOs themselves have been led to overestimate the latter's role.

Apologists for organized business have rung the alarm bells and advised against extending any recognition to NGOs to represent civil society.<sup>48</sup> Other writers advising corporate managers advocate co-optation: they see a "dynamic of the future" where

NGOs will play the following succession of roles as an issue develops: (1) an activist NGO floats an issue as a problem; (2) NGOs, usually in coalition, initiate a campaign to which public opinion responds either strongly (e.g. baby formula) or weakly (e.g. Disney); (3) with enough public response, governmental or intergovernmental bodies become involved, and NGOs participate in drafting new laws, regulations or codes; (4) NGOs become active monitors of legal/regulatory/code compliance; (5) NGOs become resources to corporations in future policy decisions.<sup>49</sup>

There is no better description of the process of which former Dutch Minister Jan Pronk observed in 1982: "The corruption of the NGOs will be the political game in the years ahead".<sup>50</sup>

Against this background, it may appear less paradoxical that tension between unions and NGOs has arisen where the defence of workers' rights is involved. This is particularly true when it comes to workers' rights in specific TNCs or sectors of industry.

Nowhere has this been more obvious than in connection with the codes of conduct many companies have embraced as protection against the pressures of public (consumer) opinion. Some NGOs have accepted that developing and monitoring codes of conduct constitutes a defence of workers' rights (for example in terms of salaries, working conditions, health and safety, etc.), even when there is no provision for recognition of or mechanism for enforcement of trade union rights. In such cases, unions have viewed NGOs as accomplices in the companies' attempts to use codes as a means to avoid unionization.

In 1990, 85 per cent of the top 100 US corporations were found to have a code; in the United Kingdom this figure was 42 per cent, and in the Netherlands, 22 per cent.<sup>51</sup> However, most codes of conduct that address social issues are limited in their coverage and do not address basic labour rights. In 1998, the ILO analysed 215 codes and found that only 15 per cent included a positive reference to union rights (freedom of association and the right to collective

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<sup>48</sup> Martin Wolf, "Uncivil Society", in *Financial Times*, 1 September 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Schwartz and Gibb, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Edwards and Hulme, op. cit., p. 1.

<sup>51</sup> S.P. Kaptein and H.K. Klamer, *Ethische Bedrijfscodes in Nederlandse Bedrijven*, Nederlands Christelijk Werkgeversbond publisher, The Hague, 1991; quoted in Gijsbert van Liemt, *Codes of Conduct and International Subcontracting: A "Private" Road Towards Ensuring Minimum Labour Standards in Export Industries*, paper presented at the conference on Multinational Enterprises and the Social Challenges of the 21st Century, Leuven, 3-4 May 1999.

bargaining), whereas 25 per cent referred to forced labour, 40 per cent to wage levels, 45 per cent to child labour, 66 per cent to discrimination and 75 per cent to health and safety issues.<sup>52</sup>

This comes as no surprise since in some cases companies adopted codes as part of a union avoidance strategy by pre-emption, preferring to offer a paternalistic package unilaterally rather than have a recognized negotiating body to deal with. As the ICFTU has pointed out, “many of the US-based companies that were the first to adopt codes were, in both principle and practice, opposed to trade unions”.<sup>53</sup> For example, the Caterpillar code states that the company seeks to “operate the business in such a way that employees don’t feel a need for representation by unions or other third parties” and the Sara Lee Knit Products (SKP) code states that the company “believes in a union-free environment except where law and cultures require (SKP) to do otherwise.” The DuPont code reads: “employees shall be encouraged by lawful expression of management opinion to continue an existing no-union status, but where employees have chosen to be represented by a union, management shall deal with the union in good faith”.<sup>54</sup>

Another problem has been compliance monitoring. Most codes do not provide for a credible independent monitoring procedure, or for strong enforcement and complaints mechanisms. Unions have argued that the existence of independent trade unions throughout the operations of TNCs is the most efficient monitoring system.<sup>55</sup> Many companies have gone to great lengths, and expense, to use other monitoring systems (creating their own, contracting out to commercial monitoring enterprises or to compliant NGOs) with dubious results.

These unresolved issues were at the bottom of the implosion of the White House Apparel Industry Partnership (AIP) in November 1998. The AIP, also known as the “anti-sweatshop taskforce”, was set up in 1996 on the initiative of the US President after embarrassing revelations that garments produced under the Kathie Lee Gifford label were being made in sweatshops in New York and Central America. Its task was to draw up a code of conduct eliminating such conditions. Companies adopting the code would be able to label their products certifying that they were made under humane conditions. After the task force’s 18 members—

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<sup>52</sup> Document GB.273/WP/SDL/1, and Add. 1, ILO Governing Body, 273rd Session, Geneva, November 1998.

<sup>53</sup> **Labor and Business in the Global Market (ICFTU-ITS Recommendations and Guidelines Concerning Company and Industry Codes of Labour Practice, Their Implementation and Monitoring)**, ICFTU, Brussels, December 1997.

<sup>54</sup> Caterpillar: Code of Worldwide Business Conduct; Sara Lee Knit Products: International Operating Principles; DuPont: Labour Relations Policies and Principles; quoted in “Overview of global developments and office activities concerning codes of conduct, social labelling and other private sector initiatives addressing labour issues”, ILO Document GB.273/WP/SDL/1, Add. 1, Annex, footnotes 69 and 70), November 1998.

<sup>55</sup> “The experience is that independent and secure trade unions are the most effective means of ending or of preventing the exploitation and abuse of workers. Codes of conduct are not as efficient as what workers can do for themselves when they are allowed to join free trade unions and to bargain collectively with their employer in the knowledge that their rights are secure and protected. The objectives of codes are best achieved when governments respect the trade union rights of workers. Self-promulgated codes that do not mention trade union rights give the impression that it is possible to protect workers’ interests without respecting their right to organize into independent trade unions. This impression is reinforced where codes merely pledge the company to respect national laws and practice.” ICFTU, op. cit., p. 2.

Also: “Independent monitoring by itself . . . is not sufficient to ensure respect for minimal worker rights and occupational and environmental health and safety standards. No independent monitor can substitute for the independent organization of workers through their trade unions, which must be represented on the monitoring bodies for these to meaningfully do their job.” Ron Oswald, IUF General Secretary, in a letter to the **International Herald Tribune**, 9 June 1998.

drawn from companies, unions and NGOs—remained stalemated for months, nine companies and NGOs began negotiating among themselves and produced a “preliminary agreement” (including the creation of a new entity, the Fair Labor Association (FLA), for monitoring purposes) on 2 November 1998, which was then presented to the other members of the task force for endorsement. Four other companies signed on to this agreement, but the unions, together with one NGO (the ICCR), refused to endorse it and withdrew from the task force.<sup>56</sup>

The Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE) stated:

This agreement . . . takes no meaningful step toward a living wage; it does not effectively address the problem of protecting the right to organize in countries where that right is systematically denied; it allows companies to pick the factories that will be inspected by monitors chosen and paid by the company and excludes up to 95 percent of a company’s production facilities from inspection; and it creates multiple barriers to public access to information. These are fatal flaws in a code already diluted by previous compromises. We are also concerned that this agreement will reinforce the tendency to view voluntary corporate codes of conduct as a substitute for the enforcement of existing laws and the adoption of legislation and trade agreements designed to protect the rights of workers in the global economy.<sup>57</sup>

ICCR spokespersons stated that “key principles, such as payment of a sustainable living wage to employees and credible independent monitoring are not sufficiently addressed” and that the agreement did not “spell out what companies need to do in countries where this internationally recognized right (of workers to freely associate and bargain collectively) is denied. Independent unions, controlled by workers, are an important element in the struggle to eliminate sweatshops”.<sup>58</sup>

Subsequent events showed that the misgivings of the unions and the ICCR were justified.<sup>59</sup> But a major issue implicit in this discussion is whether some of the more recent industry codes do not deliberately sidestep focused and explicit rules on labour rights in order to enable companies to conduct business in China—the largest country in the world where internationally recognized workers’ rights are denied.<sup>60</sup> China has proved irresistibly attractive to transnational business. While some consumer goods companies withdrew from China

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<sup>56</sup> The nine task force members that reached the “preliminary agreement” were Liz Claiborne, Nike, Reebok, Philips Van Heusen, Business for Social Responsibility, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the National Consumers League, the International Labor Rights Fund and the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights. The four other companies joining the agreement were L.L.Bean, Patagonia, Nicole Miller and Kathie Lee Gifford.

<sup>57</sup> Statement on the White House Apparel Industry Partnership, UNITE, 5 November 1998. See also, Commentary on the AIP “Preliminary Agreement”, UNITE, 2 November 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Statement from the ICCR, 5 November 1998.

<sup>59</sup> Nike, which was a prime mover in the AIP/FLA code of 1998, also has its own code of conduct which states that “in 1998, Nike selected NGO partners to participate in monitoring/auditing programs in three countries: Indonesia, China and Vietnam—and announced a commitment to make summaries of these audits public.” On 9 September 1999 it was reported from Jakarta that negotiations to renew a collective agreement at the world’s largest Nike contractor, PT Nikomas Gemilang (employing 23,000 workers who make 10 million Nike shoes annually for export) were deadlocked, and that the management had called in the military to intimidate the workers. The Campaign for Labor Rights, a US NGO, commented: “The AIP code commits Nike to respect freedom of association. Meanwhile, factories producing for Nike in Indonesia continue to dismiss known union organizers—without a murmur of protest from Nike executives or ‘monitors’. Corporate-oriented ‘monitors’, such as Ernst & Young and Price Waterhouse, in spite of their expensive contracts, don’t seem to be able to detect violations of codes, even when those occur under their noses.” Labor Alerts, Campaign for Labor Rights, 9 September 1999; see also footnote 9.

<sup>60</sup> The same would apply to Myanmar, Laos and Viet Nam and, to some extent, Indonesia and Cambodia.

following worldwide revulsion against the repression of the democracy movement and the independent labour movement in June 1989, many stayed, some returned after pulling out, and very many invested in the subsequent decade. Organized business has been in general accommodating, if not subservient, to the regime<sup>61</sup> and calls for business to put human rights on its agenda have remained without response.<sup>62</sup> In such a situation, codes like Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) provide a way out.<sup>63</sup>

The criticism levelled by Labour Rights in China (LARIC)<sup>64</sup> against SA8000 is in essence similar to the union/ICCR criticism of the AIP/FLA code. For LARIC, SA8000 is an “escape route for corporate accountability”. LARIC denounces the lack of training of monitors and the inadequacy of monitoring procedures in general. It points out that the right of assessing workers’ rights is taken away from the workers and put in the hands of auditors answerable to companies. SA8000 also undermines the authority of states to use labour laws to change labour practices, thus “privatizing labour rights” and labour inspection: “SA8000, like other codes, can be a powerful distraction to what is recognized as possibly the most effective and democratic instrument of protection: a directly negotiated collective bargaining agreement”.<sup>65</sup>

As discussed earlier, the great diversity of NGOs renders it difficult to make general statements about them. Controversy about codes of conduct has confirmed that NGOs are on both sides of the argument. From the trade union point of view, codes cannot substitute for negotiated international agreements between unions and companies. Such agreements (for example between IUF and Danone or Accor, between ICEM and Statoil, or between IFBWW and IKEA) are fundamentally different from codes of conduct, although they are sometimes misleadingly lumped together with codes in some of the literature. They imply negotiated reciprocal rights and duties and, in this respect, are in fact collective agreements. NGOs that support unions in securing such international collective agreements are allies of the trade union movement. NGOs that support companies in sidestepping such agreements through codes of conduct are objective allies of organized business.

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<sup>61</sup> James Harding, “CEOs told fortune favours the not so brave in China”, *Financial Times*, 29 September 1999, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> **Big Business Must Put Human Rights on the Agenda**, Human Rights in China (HRIC) press release, New York, 8 September 1999, and **Fortune Conference Excludes Human Rights**, HRIC press release, 27 September 1999.

<sup>63</sup> SA8000 is intended to be an auditable social standard of the ethical production of goods and services for all companies in all industries and all countries. It was developed by the Council on Economic Priorities Accreditation Agency (CEPAA), which was established in 1997. CEPAA is an agency of the US-based Council on Economic Priorities, which was founded in 1969 and specializes in evaluating corporate social performance. CEPAA assesses and accredits certification bodies such as accounting or auditing firms. Companies that want SA8000 certification pay an accredited professional firm to do the auditing for them. The procedure is similar to those of ISO9000 (quality management) and ISO14000 (environmental management). SA8000 states that “the company shall, in those situations in which the right to freedom of association are restricted under law, *facilitate parallel means* of independent and free association and bargaining for all such personnel”.

<sup>64</sup> LARIC is a Hong Kong-based coalition including the HKCTU, China Labour Bulletin, Asia Monitor Resource Center and the HKCIC.

<sup>65</sup> **No Illusions: Against the Global Cosmetic SA8000**, LARIC, Hong Kong, June 1999. See also, **The “Code of Conduct” Campaign and Transnational Corporations**, LARIC, 20 July 1999.



## Union/NGO Co-operation: Premises and Potentials

Trade unions and NGOs have in common not only that they are part of civil society, but that they have specific agendas for the improvement of society, and that they can legitimately claim to be serving the interests of society in general. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that co-operation has developed between organized labour and NGOs on a wide variety of issues. However, union/NGO co-operation depends in specific cases on shared objectives and also on their respective situations: the source of their legitimacy; whether their operations are transparent or not; to whom they are accountable; and whether they are democratically managed or not.

Where difficulties have arisen, the last factor has been at the root of the problem. For this reason, it is also necessary to understand how trade unions and NGOs differ.

All trade unions have a clearly defined constituency: the members, to whom the leaders are accountable. Union leaders are elected at regular intervals by representative governing bodies, such as a congress. The leadership may change with the next election, and is sometimes subject to recall. Union accounts are usually open, audited and subject to the scrutiny of members and the general public. The consequences of union policy are immediately felt by members (for example, in the form of good or bad collective bargaining results).

Consequently, monitoring and evaluation of trade union performance takes place constantly, beginning in the workplace by the members, and more formally in elected governing bodies meeting frequently. Union leaders are obliged to sustain a permanent discussion with the membership about the merits of any given policy; they have to relate short-term goals to long-term objectives in a way that is understandable to the membership and ensures its support, while constantly checking that the policies they propose reflect the membership's needs and its collective political will. A typical trade union is a democratic organization in which the members have a sense of citizenship and ownership.<sup>66</sup>

Like trade unions, NGOs are voluntary organizations, but they are not subject to the same rules. Some NGOs are membership organizations and have adopted democratic structures. In principle this is the case for the labour NGOs and for a number of others. But not all NGOs necessarily have a membership that has a sense of citizenship and of ownership of their organization. In many cases, NGOs have a self-appointed and co-opted leadership, are not accountable to any constituency other than public opinion and their funders, do not provide public financial information, and have no clear monitoring and evaluation procedures. This gives them greater flexibility and mobility, including a capacity to respond rapidly in emergencies, but it raises questions of legitimacy, transparency and accountability.

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<sup>66</sup> Obviously, this does not apply in all cases: we know of bureaucratized unions with a dictatorial internal regime, corrupt unions, and unions subject to outside control (by employers, governments, political groups). They are marginal. If they were not, the trade union movement would never have survived. Equally, there are cases of fraudulent and corrupt NGOs, which are also marginal. For the purpose of this discussion, we need to define a typology, that is focus on the fundamental characteristics of the organizations we are discussing.

Class-based cultural differences have played their part. Many NGOs (other than the labour NGOs) originated in the nineteenth century culture of charity and philanthropy. This was not necessarily an obstacle to collaboration in the past. Charitable or welfare organizations, initiated and led by middle- and upper-class reformers, co-operated with the labour movement on political issues such as the abolition of slavery and child labour, universal adult suffrage, and even industrial issues (known examples are Annie Besant, a British reformer, taking up the cause of the London matchgirls' strike of 1888, and Cardinal Manning supporting the British dockers in their strike the following year).

But a culture of charity is fundamentally different from a culture of solidarity. Whereas charity is basically an authoritarian, top-down relationship between unequal partners, solidarity is a reciprocal relationship in which equal partners accept mutual rights and obligations. The culture of the labour movement is one of solidarity in a struggle for social change, whereas many NGOs have a welfare and basic needs agenda rather than a social change agenda.

In recent decades, decolonization and the emergence of the concept of the "Third World", the rise of transnational companies and the beginnings of globalization, and the radicalization of parts of the middle class (the students' movement, the women's movement, churches under the impact of liberation theology, etc.) also led much of the NGO community to adopt a radical agenda of fundamental social change.

This new political agenda, however, did not necessarily lead to a closer relationship with the trade unions, nor did it fundamentally change NGO culture. On the contrary, trade unions came to be perceived by many of their middle-class radical critics as conservative, bureaucratic institutions unable or even unwilling to advance their members' and society's true interests. The line of attack against social democracy by the radical left of different tendencies was echoed in the attacks of some NGOs against the (overwhelmingly social-democratic) trade unions. A few politically radical NGOs became interested in organizing workers outside the trade union framework, in supposedly more democratic forms, thus deliberately entering into direct conflict with the trade unions.

Pressures generated by globalization of the world economy and its social consequences are again changing the relationship between unions and NGOs and their mutual perception. The threat of the neoliberal agenda, endorsed by a majority of leading governments, against the prospect of a just, egalitarian and democratic society, shared by unions and most NGOs, has powerfully strengthened the case for co-operation. In an increasingly hostile environment, pressures are mounting in the trade union movement against everything that has been holding it back from fulfilling its mission: bureaucratism; conservatism; turf battles that only serve the interests of entrenched leaderships and damage the general interest; the proletarian macho culture hostile to women, etc.; in other words, those features many NGOs seized on to draw general conclusions and dismiss the movement as a whole. The leadership and policy change in the AFL-CIO in 1995, which is hopefully only the beginning of a process, is a symptom of these pressures. Emerging "new union movements" – the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, the Central Única dos

Trabalhadores and Movimento Sim Terra in Brazil, and COSATU in South Africa—are trade union movements that have taken responsibility for the problems of society in general. They have forged strong links with other elements of civil society, in particular community-level organizations, and have political programs for reform. On the NGO side, the resilience of the trade union movement under conditions of adversity and its capacity for self-renewal (also of some of the labour NGOs) have not gone unperceived. These conditions are favourable for increased union/NGO co-operation. Let us consider the premises for such co-operation.

The issues with the greatest potential for union/NGO co-operation are those in which an overriding shared principle is involved and, in practice, it is on this kind of issue where co-operation is most often already taking place (as in the examples given earlier of co-operation between agricultural workers' unions and NGOs in combating the use of hazardous pesticides in the interest of public health; co-operation between chemical workers' unions and NGOs in combating pollution hazards in the interest of protecting the environment; and co-operation between unions and women's NGOs in providing education and organizing women workers in the interest of advancing women's rights). The objective of this kind of co-operation is generally to influence the conduct of other actors in society, such as public authorities or business.

An overarching principle is the defence of human rights and this issue does constitute a key point of contact for NGOs and unions. This requires acceptance on the part of the NGOs involved, first, that the rights of workers as workers are a human rights issue, and second, that workers' rights are a union rights issue because workers have no other way to express their collective interests except through independent and democratic trade unions.

Not all NGOs accept this position—some development NGOs have challenged the universal applicability of union rights as a form of disguised protectionism, driven by the unions in industrialized countries. Against this view, unions and other NGOs have argued that the absence of union rights, as well as inhuman working conditions and extreme exploitation resulting from the absence of such rights, cannot be accepted as a comparative advantage in development. Most NGOs and certainly all human rights NGOs would support the position that the core labour standards included in the Social Charter adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1998 (including the right of workers to freely organize, to negotiate collectively and to take industrial action in support of their demands) represent basic human rights applicable in all countries.

A commonality of objectives is, of course, the first and most basic condition for successful co-operation. But further conditions are reciprocal transparency, accountability and mutual respect. These are indeed rules of good conduct basic to any constructive partnership between organizations and in social relations in general.

Mutual respect means that each partner must be prepared to respect and endorse the objectives of the other. NGOs should recognize that they have different responsibilities from unions and,

consequently, they should not seek to substitute for unions unless there are overriding reasons for doing so.<sup>67</sup>

In a globalizing economy and society, trade unions face three main tasks: organizing in TNCs, organizing the informal sector, and connecting with other civil society actors to advance their broader social and political agenda. In all of these areas, they have formed partnerships with NGOs and this trend is likely to continue because it is mutually beneficial. NGOs wishing to act in the public interest are finding in trade unions the social anchor and reality check that neither their constituency nor relationships with other social actors (such as business or governments) can provide.

An earlier section described the ways trade unions and NGOs are different. These differences—in constituency, governance and culture—have a root cause: trade unions are, by definition and not by choice, in a continuing power struggle with organized business and governments that defend business interests. The way society develops depends on the shift in global power relations resulting from this struggle. In this context, NGOs may seek different roles, seeing themselves as partisans or mediators, or in denial they may sidestep the issue entirely. Another perspective is to consider that NGOs are about intentions, whereas unions are about results. Therefore the responsibility of building a broad-based people's movement for social progress and ultimately determining the direction it will take rests largely with the trade union movement. It will share this responsibility with NGOs that clearly define themselves, in word and deed, as allies of organized labour.

A common starting point should be to define the legitimate purpose of any form of social organization, whether local or worldwide; in other words, to affirm that enterprises, or an economic system, have legitimacy only to the extent that they serve human welfare in the widest sense of the term (the satisfaction of basic needs, including justice, equality, freedom, access to culture and the rule of law). These values and basic principles, which of course need elaboration, together constitute a program of radical democracy diametrically opposed to the currently hegemonic neoliberalism, and this should become the basic program that the labour movement and all NGOs with the objective of improving society should defend at all levels with all appropriate means. At issue is the kind of world we will live in tomorrow, in 10 or 20

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<sup>67</sup> Cases exist in which NGOs have successfully defended and organized workers in situations where trade unions have failed in their mission. This has happened when trade unions have been undemocratic (for example under state control, or when they have been hijacked by an undemocratic and corrupt leadership) and have failed to properly organize and represent their constituency or, even with democratic structures and in a free environment, have failed to organize significant groups of workers (in most such cases, women workers). A classic example of the first case is that of the Polish KOR, which did the groundwork leading to the emergence of the Solidarity trade union movement. (See Jan Józef Lipski, **KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland 1976-1981**, University of California Press, 1985.) An illustration of the second case is the work of the Korean Women Workers' Association United, which led to the formation of the Korean Women's Trade Union in 1999. Also, in Chile (in the case of seasonal women workers in the fruit and vegetable packing industry), in Nicaragua (women workers in the Free Trade Zone), and in Mexico (*maquilas*), women's NGOs claim to fill a vacuum left by the lack of commitment of the existing trade unions to organize women workers. It should be noted that such NGO efforts, when successful, lead to the creation of new trade unions and therefore to a renewal of the trade union movement. An altogether different situation arises when an NGO makes an agreement with a company, for example to monitor its code of conduct, and assumes the representation of the company's workers without establishing democratic structures of accountability, that is democratic and independent unions, either in co-operation with existing unions or by facilitating the organization of new unions.

years. The common objective must be to reconstitute the social movement worldwide, with the means provided by globalization and its technologies. This new social movement will be the liberation movement of humanity and its weapons will be the fax and the computer.



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