

Will an Alternative Global Labour Network Take Off and Take Shape at the World Social Forum, Belem, 2009?

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Introduction

This is a contribution to discussion that has been taking place at various Social Forums and related events over the last year or two. Much of this has been within the 'Labour and Globalisation' (L&G) network. It has been something of a haphazard process since the network has no fixed abode, far less an office or officers, and its rather attractive list, <http://openesf.net/projects/labour-and-globalization/summary>, has been regrettably under-utilised and was affected, late-2008, by some infantile disorder (of a digital kind). I expressed my confusion at that moment (Waterman 2008a). The problem has now been corrected.

Then, just as I was about to post this note, January 12 I think, I received various emails from de facto L&G coordinator, Marco Berlinguer, about the timetable and proposed content of the L&G programme for Belem, as well as the spread of the network to the USA, all of which suggests that the project is in better shape than it has recently appeared. Marco has also moved the list to another e-dress, as follows:

*To post at the new list, the address is: <
wsf-l-and-g@lists.euromovements.info>
*To inscribe or unsubscribe the address is:
<http://lists.euromovements.info/mailman/listinfo/wsf-l-and-g>

I will not attempt to record or respond to these latest mailings. I already have too many appendices. But I am, of course, intending to post this on the list. And I will post it to my own network, in the hope of reaching more labour movement people attending Belem, and of involving more in the online network.

Creating such a network is a delicate and complex matter in so far as it is an attempt to create a space attractive and open to both the traditional inter/national union bodies organising workers in the so-called 'formal economy', and networks, movements or non-governmental organisations often working with workers in so-called 'atypical' work. As the distancing quotes might suggest, the problem is also a matter of how 'work' and 'the labour movement' are to be understood in the epoch of computerisation and globalisation, dominated by the ultra-capitalist politics and ideology of neo-liberalism. It is also a matter of how an autonomous labour network can be most effective under such conditions - and at a moment in which global capitalism is yet again demonstrating its multiple

incapacities and inhumanities.

Complexity is increased because any such network is involved in the articulation of both the above parties with the 'global justice and solidarity movement' (my preferred name for it) in general and the World, European and other such Social Forums in particular. This is not yet to speak of the surely desirable impact of any such new initiative on a hypothetically sympathetic global public.

The items attached as appendices below have mostly been, or are likely to be, posted on this list. So, no doubt, will later reports on L&G and other labour or union activities at the Belem, Brazil, WSF, January 27-February 2, 2009. But it needs to be remembered that the traditional inter/national unions are likely to have their own activities at Belem and have their own spaces on the web. Moreover, there are labour-related networks, dealing with such categories as rural or migrant labour, with working women, with safety at work and ecology, or the 'solidarity economy', that may be taking their own initiatives at Belem and online.

What follows, finally, is not intended to directly comment on the contributions appended but it has certainly been stimulated by such. Some of my previous such contributions to the new global labour networking, particularly my own ideas on a global labour charter movement, are listed in the bibliography appended.

Purpose of an alternative global labour network

I think we need a network that would contribute to the revival or reinvention of a global labour movement in the light of 1) capitalist globalisation and informatisation (now in considerable political-economic and ideological crisis), and 2) the new global justice and solidarity movement developing in response to such.

Such a network should, I believe, simultaneously, raise the profile of the 'labour question' within an event and movement in which it has so far been somewhat (self-)marginalised and (in comparison with 'women' or 'peasants') certainly under-estimated.

One key here is to revive the historical notion of 'the emancipation of labour', understood now not as sole or primary vanguard of global social emancipation from capitalism but as an essential partner in such a general movement.

Another key is a revival of the utopian element present within early labour movements, meaning the imagination of a world beyond capitalism, and the development of structures, strategies and relationships in the light of such (rather than assuming capitalism is worldwide, all-powerful and eternal, accepting the subordination of labour and being permanently on the defensive against an agenda and language determined by capital, state or interstate agencies). As part of a radically-democratic civil society in formation, labour can not only be more socially assertive but also more effective in self-defence.

Are we going to learn from history?

This is not the first or only attempt to create global labour solidarity networks either within or

beyond 'the factory wall or the union office'.

There was the West-Europe-based 'shopfloor labour internationalism' of the 1980s. There is still the Australia-based Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights (Sigtur). There was an international-union and social- movement roundtable, Bangkok, 2002. There are and have been dozens of others, focused on particular issues (e.g. union rights, health and safety), limited to certain regions, ideologically-inspired, and one-off solidarity actions or exchanges. Labour also figures prominently within a Socialist-cum-Thirdworldist project, led by the Egyptian political-economist and activist, Samir Amin, that intends to challenge the WSF (Waterman 2008c).

The point is that these provide both positive and negative – not to mention complex or problematic - models or lessons. Feeding such ideas and experiences into this new project is not so difficult. It might require simply a 'History' or 'Experiences' sub-section on the below-discussed list or web page. But awareness of such is essential if bad history is not to be repeated nor already- existing models duplicated.

Can we discuss 'Decent Work'?

As most readers of this item will be aware, DW is the major current campaign on 'labour and globalisation' of the traditional inter/national trade union movement. Indeed, it has been energetically promoting DW at Social Forum events. But DW has been simply adopted by the unions from an inter-state body, the International Labour Organisation (itself seriously criticised for its incapacities in the face of globalisation by a former insider, (Standing 2008)).

Neither the origin of DW in an inter-state organisation (75 percent dominated by the political-economic hegemon!) nor its assumptions of natural and eternal capitalist ownership and control have been discussed by the unions. Indeed, criticism of DW – or of the ILO – has only just begun amongst critical labor specialists (as Appendix 4 complains, the bourgeoisie is discussing Marx whilst the Left is discussing Keynes). I am primarily concerned here, however, that DW, and alternatives to such, be *discussable*, civilly of course, within any autonomous labour network. The alternative would be to preserve silences at a time in which the surpassing of diplomatic relations in the labour movement is a requirement for renewal. Whether the labour movement identifies with the DW campaign or not, it seems to me, is less important than a recognition that we need to at the very least to discuss it.

Breadth of our constituency

The L&G project will obviously appeal to both traditional unionised/unionisable labour organisations and those in urban or rural sub-contracted or petty-commodity production, trade and services (customarily called the 'informal' sector or 'atypical' workers, more recently the 'precariat'), as well as migrant labour (for an experience at national level, see Leonardi 2008). But it needs to simultaneously address itself to the question of 'work', notably to that of women as customarily unpaid housekeepers and carers, an increasing proportion of wage-earners globally. Further, it needs to address itself to the urban and rural communities and ecologies in which working people *live*, and to all those forms in which attempts are made to surpass traditional capitalist work and income, such as the 'economy of solidarity', the 'basic income grant', worker participation and self-management, ecologically-friendly production and consumption.

Global solidarity relations

The L&G initiative already has a modest global and European presence, in so far as networking occurs within social forums at these levels. There are also, however, labour initiatives within other regions, such as those related to the US Social Forum 2007. No doubt there are or will be regionally-specific others.

It is essential that any new labour network establish *relations of equality* between such particular or regionally-specific partners (as StreetNet, Via Campesina, or the International Centre for Trade Union Rights), thus surpassing any traditional Westcentrism or, for that matter, the prioritisation of one organisational form (the union) over other forms of self-organisation and self-expression (the network, the pro-labour NGO, cultural and communication centres, whether online or offline).

Autonomy and flexibility

Any innovatory and emancipatory labour project needs to preserve and demonstrate its autonomy from capital, state, patriarchy and empire, any such inter-state organs as the European Union or such agencies such as the ILO, political parties, particular religious or secular ideologies, as well as from any other institutions that might have traditionally dominated the labour movement. The notion of equality and mutual respect between different actors is clearly essential for innovation. It is also functional to the flexibility and agility necessary for a labour movement capable of confronting a globalised, informatised and networked capitalism.

A Global Labour Charter

There is, apparently, growing L&G interest in the proposal for some kind of public declaration, statement, charter or manifesto that would provide any new labour network with a visible, assertive, autonomous and attractive public profile. This would also challenge the inter/national union organisations to discuss what has so far been un-discussable or anyway undiscussed.

Within the WSF at Belem 2009, the Cacim network (New Delhi-based and responsible for a series of publications challenging both the WSF and one of its major critics, <http://www.cacim.net>) has proposed an event in which a GLC could be discussed. Interest is appearing elsewhere (Appendix 4 again). I am hoping that L&G will provide sufficient time and space for a full discussion on such matters (see Appendices 3a, b and Marco Berlinguer's latest online messages). Cacim has indicated its preparedness to merge as well as, hypothetically, to provide extra time and space for more extended discussion.

The prioritisation of cyberspace

In any attempt to create a new kind of global labour solidarity movement, I am convinced priority has to be given to cyberspace.

This is not only because *cyberspace* allows for the necessary flexibility and speed of operation,

nor its capacity for free, open and equal exchange of ideas and experiences. It is also a matter of surpassing the heavy financial cost and inevitable hierarchy implicit in any global, or even regional or national, network that prioritises *place*-based operations, whether in offices, at conferences, or at World Social Forum events themselves.

Whilst face-to-face relations are essential, the web allows for, encourages and even requires the new kind of open and horizontal relations commonly demonstrated by the global social justice movement. Whilst internet inequalities, limits of reach and other problems must be recognised and addressed (Morozov 2008), these are surely less than the privileges/inequalities implied by (air) travel to forum events, accomodation costs, access to instantaneous translation, etc. Increasing numbers and kinds of autonomous and internationalist labour sites suggest the potential of a new computerised labour internationalism.

Ideas, research, intellectuals

Ideas, research and intellectuals (IRI) must be structured into the network or their relationship to L&G has to be specified. Given the extent to which unions and other labour movements (including the rural) have or produce their own IRI, and the new wave of labour-oriented academics working on international labour issues, a dialogical relationship across this 'division of labour' is essential. In so far as any webspace has sections or subheads allowing for open discussion, for relevant links, for documentation and resources, such an organic relationship may spontaneously develop. One international academic labour movement network (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/rc44.htm>), is already proposing to stage a Union/WSF dialogue at its 2010 conference (email received 080109). Such initiatives from our side would reach wider and be welcomed by all.

The name of this rose

Any new global labour solidarity network needs, by preference, a name and/or an acronym, that expresses its orientation or purpose and that *distinguishes it from others*. If the name can be or become accepted across languages, so much the better. Even better would be if it was unique or at least uncommon when searched for on the web (e.g. Via Campesina, StreetNet, Choike – which has an excellent labour page).

I have proposed 'Emancipation of Labour' or 'Labour and Global Social Emancipation'. If one wants a more narrowly-defined network, 'Labour and the World Social Forum', or more broadly, for that matter, something like the '(New) Global Labour Solidarity (and Justice) Network'. Options are infinite. And almost any would be better than the purely descriptive 'Labour and Globalisation', which suggests no purpose, direction or values - and which has some 10,000 entries on Google! A competition (online of course) for a name might itself raise interest in the network.

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Appendix 1

[Marco Berlinguer to Labour and Globalisation List, January ?, 2008]

Dear all,

First of all I am sorry for all the difficulties we had with our lists and communication in the last weeks, partly due also to my long stay in US. We potentially accumulated problems. But I hope we will now find ways to put again our work on its better way.

This email is about the proposal about organizing a new *yearly European Conference, *we started to discuss in our L&G meeting in Malmo. Another email will follow about our activities at the WSF.

The proposal - you will remember - was about organizing a new yearly European Conference, where European trade unions and other social actors and movements could share a more strategical debate and progressively a common agenda for Europe. The idea was to hold it in parallel with the yearly European Council, which meets every March to set up the agenda for the year of the European Union.

A lot of confusion has surrounded this proposal in the last weeks for the overlapping of different initiatives and many misunderstandings. And the block of the mailing lists has further contributed.

Now the time to save the idea is very short. Felipe Van Keirsbilck of the ACV-CSC, who originally raised the idea in Malmo, has circulated in December a draft and informal proposal. It didn't reach the list because of the block, as many other communication.

***I am putting the Felipe's proposal in attachment*.**

I personally strongly share the proposal and the need of such a space. So, though I see many difficulties, in the last days I took the initiative to push for discussing the possibility of doing a first experiment this year and to use the opportunity of an important European gathering that is taking place this weekend in Paris.

After Felipe gave his ok, today I asked the organizers of the Paris meeting to book a space to have a meeting dedicated to discuss the Felipe's proposal and the possibility to organize such a yearly Conference. Thanks to Amelie Canonne of Aitec, we have now a space.

The meeting will take place on* Saturday *the next *10th of January at 18.00. *The venue is *AGECA, 177 rue de Charonne, 75011 Paris.*

I understand that few of the potential interested people will be able to participate, but we didn't have any other realistic possibility to meet.

I hope many of you will anyway keep interested in the idea and will show this interest, expressing it and sending ideas, proposals, remarks and comments to Felipe's proposal etc..

We will explore in Paris the conditions of possibility and eventually the method to follow in the implementation of the idea. And we'll report you back.

All the best

Marco

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Archive: <http://openesf.net/projects/labour-and-globalization/lists/esf-labour-globalization/archive/2009/01/1231181511377>

To unsubscribe send an email with subject "unsubscribe" to esflabourandglobalization@lists.openesf.net.
Please contact esflabourandglobalization-manager@lists.openesf.net for questions.

Appendix 2

[Felipe van Keirsbilck to ESF L&G List, attached to the previous item, but originally submitted late-2008. Mostly in French]

dear all,

here my proposal in two parts :

- 1 - some ideas on what the project should be on a mid term
- 2 - what's to be done for the short term - 2009 ?

I have written it in french - my english is (as you can see) quite bad - I can translate, but if someone can do it faster & better ...

Waiting for your reactions

Conférence annuelle de printemps
du mouvement social européen
(nom à vérifier)

Ce texte est une contribution personnelle de Felipe Van Keirsbilck au débat initié dans le réseau Labour & Globalisation et au FSE de Malmö.

Il n'exprime pas la position officielle de la CSC-ACV, qui est encore en réflexion pour définir son engagement éventuel.

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* *

Il vise à imaginer ce que pourrait être

1. -

Un mécanisme annuel permettant, en tirant parti de la régularité et de la centralité des « Sommets de Printemps » (Bruxelles, mars), de construire un lieu d'échanges structurés sur l'agenda et la stratégie des luttes prioritaires pour l'Europe Sociale.

2. -

Une formule modeste, vu les délais et les inconnues, pour faire démarrer ce mécanisme en mars 2009.

*

1. Construire un outil d'approfondissement annuel de notre stratégie

La dynamique des Forums Sociaux offre énormément de liberté et d'ouverture, mais n'offre ni n'offrira

à l'avenir aucune capacité de décider, de coordonner, ni même d'harmoniser sérieusement les agendas (les déclarations finales sont, à de rares exceptions près comme le 15 février 2003, l'addition de tous les agendas en présence).

Le fonctionnement de la CES a un mérite, c'est qu'il conserve l'unité de ses nombreuses organisations membres (représentant l'essentiel du mouvement syndical européen), malgré la grande diversité des situations et des histoires nationales. Ce fonctionnement au consensus a un revers bien connu : les discussions difficiles, ou qui ne sont pas prêtes ou pas souhaitées par l'un ou l'autre membre, ont peu de chance de progresser.

Ni le FSE ne voudra renoncer à l'ouverture et à la liberté totale qui fait son originalité, ni la CES à son unité par le consensus sur les points importants. A l'intersection de ces deux formes d'organisation, on pourrait créer une conférence qui accueillerait des représentants mandatés (dirigeants ou experts qualifiés et mandatés) de plusieurs syndicats importants membres de la CES, éventuellement d'autres syndicats membres du réseau Labour & Globalisation, et d'organisations ou de réseaux altermondialistes, nationaux ou européens, suffisamment proches du monde syndical, et ayant une notoriété ou une action réelle dans le sens de l'Europe Sociale.

Cette conférence se réunirait en tout cas une fois par an, trois ou quatre jours, en mars. De préférence à Bruxelles si cela semble efficace.

MEDIAS ?

Cette conférence ne devrait pas être conçue comme un événement médiatique, ni destiné à toucher en tant que tel l'opinion publique. Si impact public il doit y avoir (espérons-le), ce ne serait pas parce que 60 personnes ont travaillé en mars 2009 ou 2012 dans un centre de réunion à Bruxelles, mais parce que six mois après, peut-être avec la contribution de réflexions partagées lors de cette conférence, un certain nombre d'organisations mèneraient sur leur terrain des actions coordonnées sur le thème x ou y.

ANNUEL

L'importance d'un événement annuel sur base d'un schéma stable (qu'on améliore d'année en année, mais qu'on ne réinvente pas à zéro à chaque fois) et si possible d'une groupe de participants (organisations et personnes) assez stable également, est amplement démontrée par la difficulté présente d'inventer la formule, ou par l'expérience que nous avons de dispositifs « one shot ».

FONCTIONNEMENT

Le modèle du merging ouvert en vigueur au FSE ne permet pas de progresser vers les objectifs de cette conférence annuelle. Il faut que les participants et leur organisation disposent plusieurs mois à l'avance (minimum six semaines en tout cas) d'un programme des discussions, sur un nombre limité de thèmes, avec les documents mis en discussion.

Un simple « secrétariat » réceptionnant les initiatives auto-organisées ne peut donc pas suffire. Il faut

que les organisations qui prendraient l'initiative (ou la soutiendraient) désignent un comité organisateur qui prépare un programme, sélectionne des orateurs pour des panels équilibrés et efficaces, et planifie un agenda permettant de réelles discussions, conduisant à des conclusions (pas de décisions, la conférence étant un lieu d'échanges et de coordination, mais au moins des conclusions actant les points de convergence, les divergences, les questions à travailler).

*

2. Quid en mars 2009 ?

Il reste 12 à 14 semaines, avec des congés.

Mettre sur pied un événement de grande ampleur qui respecte les exigences formulées plus haut (délai acceptable de préparation) semble impossible : il n'y a pas encore, début décembre, de comité d'initiative. Mais il y a eu de bons échanges d'idées et de nombreuses manifestations d'intérêt.

Ne rien faire en mars 2009 serait pourtant rater l'occasion « d'amorcer la pompe ».

Ma proposition (chiffres purement indicatifs – à titre d'illustration) :

- Nous cherchons un comité d'initiative formé de responsables désignés par 4 à 8 organisations (syndicats en tout cas, organisations altermondialistes proches) qui acceptent de réfléchir ensemble pour aboutir avant fin janvier à une proposition concrète.

(Il me semble qu'en tout cas Marco Berlinguer pour le réseau Labour and Globalisation, des collègues de la CGT, de la CGIL et de la FGTB ont manifesté leur intérêt. Attac Europe également. Il serait très bien que la CES mandate un observateur, au nom du secrétariat de la CES et/ou sous l'égide de l'ISE).

- Ce comité d'initiative formule au plus tard à la mi-janvier un projet qui précise : des dates en mars ; un format de la rencontre (par ex 60 participants 4 langues 3 jours ...) avec un budget ; et des « règles du jeu » qui précise, à l'intention des organisations qui voudraient s'inscrire dans ce processus, dans quelles conditions une organisation s'inscrit, mandate des délégués, contribue financièrement, propose des thèmes etc.

- Si les 4 à 8 organisations en question (ou la majorité d'entre elles) approuvent fin janvier le projet ainsi formulé, on fait appel à d'autres organisations, selon les règles convenues, au sein de la CES et du réseau Labour & Globalisation.

- On se limite pour 2009 à un format modeste : par exemple (chiffres purement indicatifs) trois jours de travail en trois ou quatre langues seulement avec un maximum de 20 organisations ou de 60 personnes ...

- On fait explicitement de cette édition un laboratoire pour la mise au point du dispositif annuel. Ce qui suppose qu'une partie du temps et de l'énergie est réservée à un travail « méta », autrement dit à un travail au sujet de notre travail.

Yours,
felipe

Appendices 3a and b

[Two overlapping(?) drafts from Pat Horn, received by Peter W, 050109]

Appendix 3a

Labour & Globalisation Network related to the World Social Forum processes

Introduction

Neo-liberal globalisation implies the most vicious attacks on labour. Yet labour has so far had neither the necessary centrality nor visibility within the WSF process, to respond adequately.

It is proposed to build a labour network on and in the WSF process. This network will link different experiences, understandings of and skills engaged in every place and every aspect of work.

Such a network should help us to:

- give more centrality and visibility, in this crucial historical phase, to labour issues and workers' rights in the WSF process
- develop a permanent exchange of experiences, information and knowledge
- discuss a new and enlarged understanding of labour, considering not only productive but also reproductive work; not only formal, but also informal work
- strengthen the alliances between unions, movements, intellectual forces and citizens
- go beyond defensive, isolated and ineffective struggles and find a new transnational capacity for action
- find common global objectives for such action
- confront the question of the meaning of production (what to produce, how, for whom)
- map all the different labour actors so as to enlarge the network

At the World Social Forum meeting in Nairobi in 2007, the Labour and Globalization network was initiated as a space for trade unions, social movements and other social actors to discuss impacts of globalization on labour and to ensure that the issue of labour is more visibly and broadly addressed at the next Social Fora. The Global Network is planning its first international meeting after the Nairobi WSF, to be held at WSF2009 in Belem, Brazil, 27 – 31 January 2009. European members of the network have met several times already.

PROPOSAL

- A) The network will promote directly and independently two activities to help build the identity of the network and to make progress in establishing a concrete agenda for the future of the network.
- B) The network will focus its main effort into putting the current economic crisis—and political

interventions to address it—at the centre of the WSF in cooperation with all the other organizations and networks wish to participate.

- C) The network will encourage and serve as facilitator for communication and cooperation on initiatives on other key themes in the WSF.

A. *The two proposed activities*

1) The L&G Network will create a meeting space for the convergence of representatives of the different of types of labor in the global economy, in both in the formal and the informal sector. The space is aimed to investigate the "commons"—and the differences--across the different forms of labor. This discussion paper with the Concept Note below will be circulated among diverse groups representing, or allied with, workers employed in different forms of employment. Comments, additions, and new ideas will be collected and a revised draft will be written and circulated before the WSF in Belem. Following the discussions at WSF the text will be revised again in a process that will continue with the goal of collectively writing a charter, manifesto, or declaration on labor in the era of globalization. The contact person and coordinator of this activity is Pat Horn - StreetNet – email: stnet@iafrica.com

2) Create an assembly of the L&G Network itself aimed at discussing a basic plan and organization for the work of the network after the WSF: its articulation, enlargement, objectives, web tools, and agenda. A written proposal will be circulated before the WSF in order to collect comments, suggestions and contributions which can be discussed by each individual organization. The aim is to arrive at the WSF assembly with the possibility and capacity to make decisions. The contact person and coordinator of this activity is Kjeld Jakobsen - Observatorio Social – email: kjeld@observatoriosocial.org.br

B. *The focus on the current economic crisis*

The L&G Network will propose a plan of convergence about the global financial and economical crisis, to many other organizations and networks in global movements interested in creating at the WSF a common space of analysis, discussion and, where possible, of intervention. The circulation of written analyses and proposals on the crisis will be encouraged before the WSF. The L&G Network will propose to jointly set up at the WSF an activity lasting all the three days, to progressively deepen – as far as possible – a common understanding of the crisis and of a plan of intervention to address it. The contact person and coordinator for this activity is Marco Berlinguer – Transform!/Lavoro in Movimento - email: marco.berlinguer@transform.it

C. *Other initiatives*

The L&G Network and its e-lists will serve to facilitate the communication and cooperation of initiatives in the WSF. Key themes already raised and proposed are: Migrants, Ecological Modes of Production, and International Trade.

Global Network

Informal workers' organizations SEWA (India) and StreetNet International have been invited to be part of the global network in order to ensure that issues of new forms of organizing are prominent on the

agenda, and it has also been agreed that the global network should actively work against traditional patterns of northern dominance by having sufficient representation from labour organizations of the south at the international meetings. As a result, this could be another space where informal workers' organizations can potentially strengthen the relationships between themselves, the mainstream labour movement and social movements in linking labour and livelihood issues with other issues of social and environmental sustainability.

CUT Brazil has been soliciting the input from the Labour & Globalisation Forum for WSF2009 since May 2008. To further strengthen the active participation of labour organizations from the South to create a well-balanced North-South solidarity, StreetNet has held meetings with the following:

- SEWA (India)
- GEFONT (Nepal)
- Ghana Trades Union Congress
- Nigeria Labour Congress

StreetNet is convening a trade union forum in South Africa, to be hosted by COSATU in Johannesburg, in early December, for the same purpose.

Appendix 3b

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER

Labour & Globalisation Network related to the World Social Forum processes

Concept note – Global Network

The objectives of the first international meeting (to be held in Belem in January 2009) are:

1. To jointly discuss in more depth how globalization is shaping labor relations, including a joint analysis on key policy fields that are of particular relevance;
2. To offer a space for sharing experiences of struggles for labor rights in different regions;
3. To offer a space for trade unions and social movements and other social actors to build new relationships;
4. To develop relationships of North-South solidarity based on functional equality rather than financial dependence;
5. To identify a platform of issues around which such international solidarity can be developed through international campaigns;
6. To discuss the development of the network itself (what working program, what tools to work together etc.)

CUT Brazil has been soliciting the input from the Labour & Globalisation Forum for WSF2009 since May 2008. To further strengthen the active participation of labour organizations from the South to create a well-balanced North-South solidarity, StreetNet International has held meetings with the following:

- SEWA (India)
- GEFONT (Nepal)
- Ghana Trades Union Congress
- Nigeria Labour Congress
- COSATU (South Africa)

StreetNet is an international organization of street vendors, informal market vendors and hawkers, established in November 2002¹, with 32 affiliates in 28 countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas, representing 373 120 members. Since 2003 StreetNet has used the space provided by the World Social Forum to bring street vendors, informal market vendors and hawkers to the WSF to engage with other trade union and civil society organizations. So strengthen its alliances in international civil society, StreetNet has joined the Decent Work for Decent Life campaign of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) as well as engaging in the Labour & Globalisation Network since being approached at the WSF in Nairobi in 2007.

This document has to be considered as an open one, to be discussed in any and every interested organization, network, movement, starting from here.

Challenges of globalisation for the labour movement

Globalisation has led to continuing changes in labour markets internationally. Traditional wage labour has given way to a number of forms of “a-typical”, precarious, vulnerable and other informalised labour. The informalised labour force works under conditions which resemble those of the more traditional types of informal work, such as petty commodity trading and production.² It is incumbent upon the labour movement to incorporate the changing nature of the working class as a consequence of these changes in the global labour markets, in our class struggles. Informal workers cannot be dismissed simply as members of the *lumpen-proletariat*. This would have disastrous implications for the future of class struggle as the global labour force continues to become increasingly “a-typical” – and in countries such as India (where 92% of the labour force is in the informal economy) and more than half of the countries on the African continent, it would imply that class struggle is not a revolutionary possibility. This is unnecessarily pessimistic.

The challenge facing the labour movement today is to try to understand the class relations which exist within the informal economy – which consists of workers (both workers working for some sort of wage rate, however irregular, as well as own-account workers, including home-based producers, street vendors, waste-collectors, etc.) and also entrepreneurs and employers (including labour-brokers and intermediaries).

Workers in the informal economy are part of the changing global labour market and therefore an integral part of the wider working class. This presents the challenge of organising them in alliance with the traditionally organized working class. If we regard them merely as the marginalized poor or the *lumpen-proletariat*, then we treat them at best as “welfare cases” and victims of the capitalist neo-liberal world order, or at worst as potential enemies of the working class.

¹ See www.streetnet.org.za

² See description of different kinds of work in the informal economy in “Conclusions on Decent Work and the Informal Economy” adopted at the 92nd session of the International Labour Conference of the ILO in June 2002 <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/reim/ilc/ilc90/pdf/pr-25res.pdf>

However, there are now enough instances around the world where workers in the informal economy have started to organize themselves collectively³ (mainly in developing countries, but increasingly now in the industrialized North) to demonstrate that workers in the informal economy are perfectly capable of organizing themselves as workers and engaging in collective struggles for their rights. In Guinea, West Africa, workers in the informal economy played a pivotal role in a protracted general strike which finally saw the capitulation of the State to the demand of the masses for the sacking of the Prime Minister in the first quarter of 2007. It is widely acknowledged that the workers in the formal economy would not have been able to secure this outcome without the active participation of those in the informal economy.

Many developing countries, like Guinea, who have much more than 50% of their labour force in the informal economy, have no prospect of succeeding in any mass struggles without the participation of that majority who are in the informal economy. Even in South Africa, where 30 – 40% of the labour force are in the informal economy (even though the contribution of the informal economy to the GDP is only 8 – 12%) it has been seen that mass struggles are significantly strengthened when workers in the informal economy are more seriously incorporated (e.g. during mass demonstrations against price increases during July/August 2008 where informal traders and the informal transport industry were actively engaged in some provinces).

Joint campaigns

This does not mean asking those in the informal economy just to support the actions of the formal workers against their employers. It means including the demands of informal economy workers in joint platforms, and then engaging together in the ensuing collective working class struggles. One such joint international campaign (initiated by the street vendors' sector of the informal economy) is the World Class Cities for All campaign for the inclusion of the urban poor in the preparations for the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010 and in the preparations for the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, India, also in 2010 – see www.streetnet.org.za.

Joint campaigns can be designed to create practical ways of building solidarity between the labour movement and social movements around their common civil society concerns, enabling them to unite in their common struggles against neo-liberal globalization.

Possible areas for joint North-South solidarity

In order to characterize the nature of international networks and contribute to the renewal of the labor culture and politics, the following possible areas for joint action could be considered:

1. Rights of migrant workers – formal and informal;
2. Effects of world trade and bilateral agreements (e.g. between European Union and selected countries of the South, e.g. Brazil, India, South Africa) labour standards and livelihoods of workers (formal and informal);
3. Environmental sustainability, ecological crisis and the economy;
4. Transnational decentralizations and workers' conflicts;
5. Monetary and financial crisis;
6. Chinese workers movement and Chinese investment in developing countries.

³ See www.streetnet.org.za, www.sewa.org and linked websites

Questions for consideration

- What do we want to do with this network ?
- How to escape the traditional patterns of north-south inequality ?
- Post-Belem follow-up ?
- Which other groups should we bring in to the network (other than formal and informal economy trade unionists) ?

Principles

- The global network will establish equal relationships between organizations of the south and the north, and should actively work against traditional patterns of northern dominance by having sufficient representation from labour organizations of the south at the international meetings.
- The global network will work in tandem with the international trade union movement.
- This should be a space where emerging informal workers' organizations can strengthen the relationships between themselves, the mainstream labour movement and social movements in linking labour and livelihood issues with other issues of social and environmental sustainability.

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Appendix 4

The Bourgeoisie is Discussing Marx and the Left is Discussing Keynes, but...

[Extracts from a response, by German labour activist, Helmut Weiss, helmut@free.de, to Peter Waterman's proposal for a Global Labour Charter Movement. Received 291208]

[...]

In Belem we - LabourNet Germany is the platform we use on this behalf - will make a small workshop with the brazilian federation of engineers unions in the CUT, FISENGE and UNI Latin America (they invited) about "Privatization and precarization - democratic alternatives".

The basic idea for this surged from discussions with a number of contributors to LabourNet Germany and within the ver.di union in which we thought to find some basic facts:

1. The struggles against privatization are worldwide, and are some of the largest struggles which exist nowadays;
2. In the real lot of networks that already exist, there is a minority current - which we want to support - that doesn't want only to defend existing public structures against privatization, but also want a democratization of these structures, a current that exists in several countries (from the rail in Mali to water in Japan, within the brazilian movement for re-estatization of Vale do Rio Doce and so on...);
3. This may be the struggles where a "common front" between labour unions and social movements already exists - to a certain degree (even the not very "full of life" german unions sometimes move themselves here - mostly in a way that avoids real mobilizing and so on...)

Based on these points we elaborated a very small, short and in-progress-platform with mainly three theses:

1. All basic needs of human beings should be in public hands - this includes things that ever have been in private hands as food, and divided things like housing (combined with water, energy, public transport and urban planning).
2. "Public" means under self-organized influence of workers and people (against the conception of "customers" and against bureaucracy of state, party and, of course, unions)
3. Only under such circumstances really decent work is possible: because this is not only referring to working conditions and rights, but also to what is produced...

The decent work campaign in Germany is mainly led by IG Metall and is nothing else than one of the innumerous "back to social partnership" tentatives of social democratic unions. (Here in Germany we have a situation where the bourgeois media are discussing about Marx

whereas the Left discusses Keynes). And I continue to think it could be otherwise only under the above cited circumstances.

[...]

I would find it important - at least to some extent - to think and discuss about the question: if we want to elaborate something like a Global Labour Charter (if elaborated autonomously from international unions it could become vital and important) could and should we combine it with a clear standing in anti-privatization struggles? Would this be useful?

