

## **Alternative International Labour Communication by Computer After Two Decades<sup>1</sup>**

**Peter Waterman**

*Will offline social movement organisations be willing to cede control as ordinary people increasingly leverage social networking tools to channel their own activities?* The destruction of hierarchies online means that top-down organisations will face increasing pressure from members to permit more rank-and-file debate and input. This is a healthy process and a long time in coming. If traditional organisations are to embrace the dynamism of the social networking sphere and move beyond simply posting op-eds on *Huffington Post* [a US website - PW] written by union presidents or NGO executive directors, they will have to cede significant control. Organisations that resist this trend will become increasingly irrelevant, online and offline. (Brecher, Costello<sup>2</sup> and Smith, 2009)

Rather than having more representatives or improving representation, rather even than having a form of direct democracy where 'the people' get to vote for many more purposes than merely electing leaders, the alterglobalisation movement suggests a form of democracy that rejects all formal and fixed representation... Through decentralisation and connectivity, decisions that affect an entire network of people can, in principle, be discussed at every node of that network and then decided through communication between nodes. This communication is carried out by people who act as very temporary 'representatives'...who have no decision-making power, but transmit the necessary information to make a collective decision – even a global one – in all the affected local contexts. (Maeckelbergh 2009)

[T]here is now a brief window of opportunity – a moment outside 'normal' time – where a network of social movements can actively form and radically reshape the world. To do so successfully, future movements must consciously try to avoid two distinct fates: either the dissolution into a decentralised network of loose clusters of relatively isolated groups, movements and individuals – the fate of the summit-hopping phase of the movement of movements – or a decline towards a centralised network of cadres, which severely damaged the movement in the Sixties. Our lines of flight from these dead-ends consist in wilfully pushing ourselves to learn from successful networks and evolve towards a mature distributed network with

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<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements are due to Dave Hollis and Greg Dropkin for help with or comments on drafts. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>2</sup> This was the last piece written by Tim Costello before his untimely death in late 2009. For Tim's life see the appreciation written by Jeremy Brecher in *Interface* 2/1.

abundant hubs and a powerful long tail: a movement with both mass participation and dynamic hubs of people and events, capable of evolving and responding rapidly to a fast-changing world. (Halpin and Summer 2008)

# LaborComm 2010

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Although a primarily Turkish event, this conference (and international labour film festival) suggest that alternative international labour communication by computer – and discussion on such - was alive and well in 2010. See <http://laborcomm.org/konferans-programi/>.

## Introduction

Early 2010 I launched an online survey on Alternative International Labour Communication by Computer (AILCC) for this special issue of *Interface* (Appendix 1). Although this was sent out to maybe 20-30 relevant individuals or online projects, most of whom I personally knew, I received only two replies. This less-than-meagre response clearly raises more questions than it provides answers. It nonetheless provides a provocation to reflection by myself and, hopefully, to other experienced or would-be researchers. This is particularly so if such research is motivated by the general perspective on democracy suggested by Maeckelbergh, the questions, concerning the internet and movement organisations, raised above by Brecher, Costello and Smith, and the critical orientation towards 'our' networking of Halpin and Summer. In what follows I will 1) provide some background, 2) see what can be drawn out of the two responses, 3) indicate the increasingly varied and expanding terrain of AILCC, 4) consider the light thrown by some of the literature around the topic, The Conclusion will consider 'What is to be Done?'

## 1. Background

*A short history of a short history.*<sup>3</sup> Once upon a time, even before the 'internet' and 'cyberspace' had entered coffee-break labour union discourse, Kristen Nygaard, a Norwegian computer pioneer and social democrat, tried hard and failed totally to convince the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) to go where no international union federation had gone before (Graham 1982). The proposed name of his online project was Unite/Unité (Unidad being evidently considered irrelevant to such a project). One of the reasons for this failure was the idea that this should be a *decentralised* network.<sup>4</sup> Around the same time, various union activists, labour-support groups and academics began to explore the possibilities of the new information and communication technology (ICT) for networking labour internationally (Lee 1997, Waterman 2001, 2009). Whilst much

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<sup>3</sup> The following account invites better researched ones - but that goes for the rest of the paper also.

<sup>4</sup> When the ICFTU finally set up its own website in the mid-1990s, it was non-dialogical. And although the organization has now evolved into the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), its website remains a broadcasting, or one-to-many, site. For a more explicit expression of Left institutional fears of networking, see how the Socialist Workers Party in the UK responded to informal international networking amongst its members even in the new networked millenium (ISO/IST List 2002).

of this new wave was directed toward 'the shopfloor, the grassroots, and the community', the rise of neo-liberal globalisation led both to a decline in the informal and autonomous labour projects and the rise of national and inter/national *union* projects (Hodkinson 2001, Shostak 1999). International labour internet projects independent of the traditional unions did continue but were not much reflected upon (see, however, Robinson 2008, Waterman 2007). Meanwhile the dramatic birth of the 'global justice and solidarity movement' in the 2000s was both facilitated and stimulated by an explosion in cyberspace activity and self-reflection (Colectivo Política en Red 2007, Develtere and Huybrechs 2008, Fuster Morell Forthcoming, Jong, Shaw and Stammers 2005, Wainright et.al. 2008, Walch 1999).

*My cyberspatial (dis)qualifications.* The Waterman (2009) reference shows my involvement with questions of internationalism, communication/culture, ICT and labour in the 1980s-90s. One of the pieces here collected, from 1992, was entitled [International Labour Communication by Computer](#). During the same period I was also involved with various online projects, attended numerous international conferences, and had intensive exchanges with a number of pioneers of international labour communication – including the two survey respondents, Eric Lee (of LabourStart) and Dave Hollis (then associated with LabourNet UK, LabourNet Germany, now of Netzwerk-IT). In the 1990s I set up two 'global solidarity' websites,<sup>5</sup> both of which faded or folded due to my being somewhat digitally-challenged. More recently, I have had a [personal blog](#) established for me on the bi-lingual *Choike* portal in Montevideo, am associated with the open-access online journal, [Interface](#), and am developing, with Canadian union officer/intellectual, Brian Green, a WordPress blog. This is entitled [ReinventingLabour](#) ('in the light of capitalist globalisation, informatisation and the global justice and solidarity movement').<sup>6</sup> Looking back now I have the feeling that if I was ahead of the curve in the 1980s-90s, the curve – or was it a swoosh? - left me way behind in the 2000s. So this is also an attempt to catch up, or to at least encourage others, to take over the baton.

## 2. The Survey

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<sup>5</sup> This was with the crucial assistance of a Uruguayan former student, Daniel Chavez, now with the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam.

<sup>6</sup> Late-2010 I find myself balancing between ReinventingLabour and Eric Lee's new edition of UnionBook (for which see footnote 10 below). ReinventingLabour is an individualistic effort even if two of us are involved and requires certain webskills. UnionBook is, so far, open, unmonitored, hosts numerous groups and individuals – and requires minimal blog skills. Moreover, the latter allows RL to (also) have a group space here! Perhaps, on the cautionary principle (if anything can go wrong, it will), we would be advised to keep RL going independently.

I think the two respondents speak clearly - not to say bluntly - for themselves. They only require supplementing by reader access to the two sites concerned, Eric Lee's multilingual [LabourStart](#) and Dave Hollis' mostly German-language [NetzwerkIT](#). The two responses suggest radically different orientations, the first accepting the parameters and discourses of the traditional inter/national trade union organisations, the second a radical rejection of these in favour of the network form and the anarchist/autonomist tendency within the GJ&SM. The two projects, moreover, differ so much in scale of coverage (socio-geographically), reach (in terms of audience), participation (contributors), technology (functions), that it would be tempting to see these as binarily opposed - if not as Manichean opposites (Vice v. Virtue). This would, however, be misleading, and then on two grounds: 1) we are looking at just two responses/projects, with the respondents being both white, male, West European-based (Dave is from the UK, Eric from the US), both born 1955!; 2) Manichean oppositions, and even unloaded binary ones, are obstacles to an understanding of emancipatory ICT as a complex, contradictory and intertwined process (Halpin and Summer 2008).

I note in particular from Eric's response his

1. Unqualified identification with the traditional trade union movement;
2. Notion of union internationalism as somehow both virtuous and timeless
3. Distancing himself from the idea of 'media activism';
4. Unfamiliarity with the concept of gender bias.
5. Dismissal of the idea that new media would lead to an alternative to the traditional unions:

I know that in the 1990s there were some who argued that the new media would create something utterly new, something different from and even opposed to the existing trade union movement. That has not turned out to be the case, at least not from what I can see [...] Some of those who argued for some kind of new global solidarity movement based on the web as an alternative to unions have long-since disappeared from the scene, moving on to other things[...] Meanwhile, the same cumbersome, slow-moving, unfashionable unions that were to have been eclipsed by the new technology are still there, doing their job.

In sum, Eric Lee's notion of what he and his remarkable LabourStart project are doing is of applying/supplying ICT to this historical movement organisational form, of empowering, continuing, extending traditional unionism, of democratising it and increasing its capacity for solidarity activity.

I note, in particular, from Dave's response his

1. Favouring of labour networking and the newest global social movements over traditional trade union organisations;
2. Preference for (cautious) cooperation with individuals or 'projects' rather than organisations;
3. Recognition of gender bias in his project (without considering this problematic);
4. Favouring of 'transnational' (regardless of borders?) over the 'international' (a relationship between the nationally identified?), though his transnational practice seems in largely confined to Europe;
5. Belief in the power of alternative labour media to challenge, subvert or overcome union hierarchy and complicity with capital:

Alternative labour media are something they cannot control and this often makes it dangerous to unions when they highlight/expose dubious union activities in general or in the workplace. You sometimes see the most unholy of alliances (union + management) when there are independent voices in the workforce.

In sum, Dave Hollis would seem to consider his modest ICT project as part of just that subversive/emancipatory effort Eric Lee dismisses. Largely confined to Europe and the German language, he nonetheless sees his project as part of the global justice and solidarity movement, though this appears to be more by identifying with than practically networking with it.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Invited to comment on a draft of this paper, Dave Hollis interjected at this point:

This is not quite true. Yes, we see ourselves as part of the social movements. We also have networked with, for example, the *Sozialforum Nürnberg* in the direct case of the closure of the AEG factory in Nürnberg. See the social forum campaign, 'Jobkiller Electrolux', that is to be found at <http://www.netzwerkit.de/projekte/electrolux/jobkiller>. Furthermore, we also host the SF's site. I do realise that it is a relatively small example. Although Electrolux, who lost about € 25 million in sales, may see it differently.

Even if we are largely European, btw, the UPS project is also linked from the US, it is an achievement in itself to have got that far.

The question of our attitude to the trade unions is something that needs to be better put. You are right as to our orientation and cautiousness. That said, we have cooperated with union organisations be they local (ver.di, Braunschweiger Zeitung) or national (ver.di, UPS/Galeere). In the latter case, ver.di directly links to us. [ver.di = German United Services Union – PW].

This 'co-operation' stems from our attitude of helping people to help themselves. If union branches or unions agree to this, they are welcome. However, we stick to our orientation and to the fact that individuals and not organisations participate in Netzwerk IT. (Email received 100610).

### 3. AILCC 2010

Eric Lee is right: the forward march of AILCC halted in the 1990s, but, like legendary US labour martyr, [Joe Hill](#), it never actually died. If one compares his with Dave Hollis' site, one could easily dismiss the latter. But whilst Eric's portal is a multi-functional, multilingual, innovatory and still-expanding project, and whilst he has recruited hundreds of correspondents, and has his news, solidarity campaigns and applications reproduced throughout international labour cyberspace, there are limitations to his project. And whilst Dave might seem to be running an alternative project that is both tiny and self-isolated, there are numerous other related projects, in Germany, in Europe and elsewhere that either survived the 1990s or that have grown up in parallel with the GJ&SM.

I do not have an overview of this expanding universe, far less can I here critically analyse or even simply categorise it. I can only list a number of interesting sites, of very different kinds, some of which may have survived or limped from the 1980s, some a few years or months old. Some may be no longer updating. They are listed in *Appendix 2*, with a little (self-) description for interested readers to explore, add to or analyse. A few comments:

- Some I only found whilst writing this piece, such as the remarkable bilingual *Sendika.Org*. Significant is that this comes from the borderlands between the Global North and the Global South.
- When anarchist activist [Emma Goldman](#) said that if she couldn't dance she had no interest in the revolution, she was making a critical remark about a continuing movement shortcoming. So, I find the *New Unionism Network* aesthetically outstanding, in part because it is even concerned with how it looks, and then because it clearly considers that labour activists have, or need, a sense of humour.
- The five or six sites addressed primarily to women workers or working women gives these an international profile absent from union sites – as well as from those of my two survey respondents!
- The two China solidarity sites offer visitors contrasting options in their orientations. Perhaps it is because they exist in infinite space that they are hardly required (as earthly Left equivalents have traditionally been) to compete for a limited audience or restricted place.
- I include such sites as the *International Alliance of Inhabitants*, the *Basic Income Earth Network* and *Via Campesina* precisely because the working people or issues here addressed would never be so within the hegemonic understanding of 'the labour movement' (customarily reduced to trade union

organizations) but which I consider necessary to its reinvention under contemporary capitalism.

- An event, [Organizing a Labor Movement for the 21st Century: US Social Forum 2010](#), is included because of the alternative this represents not only to the narrow vision being projected at the same moment by the ITUC Congress in Vancouver, and also because of the alternative it provides to the meagre labour fare at the World Social Forum...umm?...as-we-know it?
- A charter coming out of another event, [Degrowth Declaration Barcelona 2010](#), is included also by way of contrast to the profoundly backward-looking utopianism of the traditional union internationals.
- I cannot even begin to consider whether, or which, of these sites consider themselves as linked to the trade unions, nationally or internationally, nor to a new labour movement in some more extended sense. Nor can I sort them out in terms of closeness to or distance from state or inter-state institutions and/or funding. Nor am I particularly concerned about whether, unlike most inter/national union sites, they are subversive of capitalism or limited to a 'kinder, gentler' one.
- I cannot even consider whether or not they reproduce the conventional one-to-many model of most union sites, or whether they open out to an emancipatory alternative. What I can claim for the listing is that it represents a burgeoning world of international labour communication that exists way beyond the factory gates, the office doors - or the union office.

#### **4. Resources and literature**

Let me here first draw attention to certain resources surrounding or underlying the responses of Eric and David themselves. Some, if not all of these, can be found on their own websites. These may themselves contribute not only to an understanding of their contrasting projects but to future research on our subject area more generally.

**Eric Lee/LabourStart.** Apart from his early and influential book (Lee 1997), Eric Lee has written a series of serious [papers](#) on labour, and the internet more generally. He also has a personal [blog](#) (under the LabourStart e-dress) which reveals his prolific journalistic contributions, often about the internet or internationalism, and his political positions. Recently he has published a substantial chapter in an academic work, dealing with 'the LabourStart experience' (Lee 2010). Whilst concentrating on the News and Campaigning features of LabourStart, this chapter provides considerable information on both the successes and problems of the project. It also reinforces the impression already given in his survey response that this is a West Europe-based network, reproducing its



'particularistic internationalism' (one assuming that traditional Western unionism, industrial relations and social-partnership with capital and state are the norm to which Southern unions do or should aspire). One further impression from the site itself and from this particular chapter. This is that the management or control of LabourStart does not operate on the model of a distributed network (like a spiderweb, with multiple lines and directions of communication) but on a centralised model (like that of early national railway systems, with a hub and many peripheries), or possibly that of a wheel (with an axle, spokes and a hypothetically conjoined periphery). Participation seems to be more a matter of correspondents providing information, and inputs at LabourStart conferences<sup>8</sup>, than having any shared control of the network. This, however, would again require systematic research. And despite the impressive sophistication, multi-functionality and reach of LabourStart, I have been able to find little significant research – far less critical research – on it.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the most substantial criticism of LabourStart may be of Eric Lee's labour Zionism.<sup>10</sup>

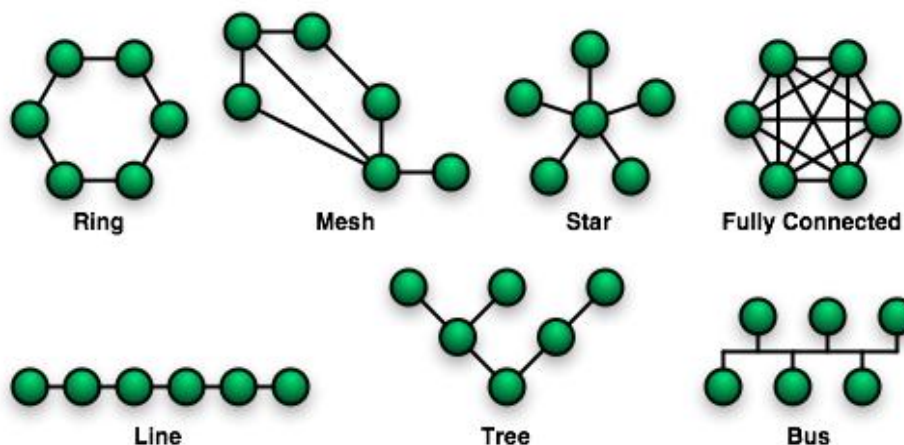
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<sup>8</sup> A major international LabourStart conference was to take place in Canada, July 2010, as I was writing this, <http://www.labourstart.org/2010/>. I looked forward to seeing any contributed documents or eventual reports. As of August 2010, however, these have been meager in the extreme. There were one or two reports in the Left media in North America but these contained little of substance. Personal attempts to obtain further information from the writers of such achieved nothing. Eric Lee himself has not reported back on the event. He did set up a [conference group on his UnionBook](#) pages. But as of mid-August it had just 22 members and little content and less feedback. The impression left is that this was less of a conference than a rally, intended less to advance dialogue and action on Global Solidarity than to rally the LabourStart community. Much more must have occurred and evidence to this effect would be welcome.

<sup>9</sup> Whilst Robinson (2008) uses, rather than critiques, LabourStart, he makes an important contribution to the study of the email solidarity campaigns that the project prides itself on. More on Robinson's study later. David Renton (2004?) discusses not only the LabourStart and the LabourNet projects but also the individuals involved (including myself, I discover 15 years later!) and their different ideas of the relationship between the internet and labour internationalism.

<sup>10</sup> Criticism has been of Eric Lee's identification with the Israeli state, as evidenced by the disproportion between his coverage of Israeli and Palestinian labour news, and of his support for Israeli militarism, <http://www.labournet.net/other/0706/labstart1.html#b>. Eric also identifies with the increasingly marginal Israeli Zionist union centre, Histadrut (for which see Greenstein 2009). It is my impression that he has made an effort to re-balance his coverage over the years, reporting extensively on union criticism of the Israeli wars against and occupation of Arab territories. This has not, however, meant that he has since separated his militant Zionism - and support for Israeli wars and high-seas piracy - from LabourStart (see again his own blog pages, <http://www.ericlee.info/blog/>). Nor does it mean he is going to publicise union solidarity campaigns with Palestine on his ActNOW! pages. Eric, moreover, hosted on the *old* version of his UnionBook the apparently autonomous, pro-Israeli, TULIP website, a site he publicly represents and actually owns! <http://www.unionbook.org/pg/groups/13644/tulip-trade-unions-linking-israel-and-palestine/>. The question must therefore arise of whether this particular TULIP was not also originally planted by him. Elsewhere he has accused unions criticizing Israel of anti-semitism, though in this case in his personal capacity (Lee 2009). Whilst this is the increasingly evident Achilles Heel of someone claiming to be in favour of international socialism, universal human rights and global labour solidarity, I actually consider it of marginal significance to a critical understanding of the LabourStart phenomenon. I note, however, that the *new* version of [UnionBook](#) (introduced around September 2010), provides so far no space for TULIP.

**Dave Hollis/NetzwerkIT.** One can find on this site a couple of papers co-authored by Dave Hollis that suggest his and its orientation. The key one here is the co-authored piece on capitalist globalisation and on networking as an appropriate form for societal and workplace response to such (Rösel, Hollis and Wanzek 2005).<sup>11</sup> They distinguish between three models, the the Line, the Star and the Fully-Connected. This advances on the language I have used above. The [diagram below](#) shows there can be even more. Whilst, on the one hand, Rösel, Hollis and Wanzek recognise that one can consider organisations *as* networks, networks *within* organisations - and even that a network can be also considered in *organisational* terms, they favour the Fully-Connected network as the model in which everyone can communicate with everyone, in which there is no hierarchy, no centre and no identifiable (permanent?) leadership (compare again Halpin and Summer 2008). It occurs to me, finally, that the Star, with no (or even with *limited*) direct connection or information flows between the peripheral nodes, may be the common model of the international trade union organisation...and therefore also for Eric Lee's LabourStart?



Rösel, Hollis and Wanzek (2005) argue further that:

As simple as it sounds, our task must be to build networks and to expand them. Our experience shows that a network is a place of exchange, activities, and can be understood as an Internet platform.

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UnionBook, moreover, has so far displayed an exemplary openness to and tolerance of dramatically varied groups and attitudes. I am hoping it will prove to be that agora for international labour dialogue I have been seeking for a couple of decades.

<sup>11</sup> His other paper is one co-authored with myself, in both English and German (Hollis and Waterman 2008a,b)

Networks are built up from below. This is already in the structure of a network. This is true both for the employed and among the unemployed. There should be no limits to the world of work. Work is a part of the society as a whole. All social issues are important to us, and sometimes vital. Therefore, there is an openness to other social movements and a perception of a collective interest. We take up political issues. Some of them are vital. Here are some examples: freedom, the right to freedom of expression, democracy and human rights, freedom of association - for all other forms of self-organization. The general right to strike, the right to solidarity strikes and campaigns, the fight against political dismissals. As networks, it is understood that we must be part of the social movements. What is also clear that no higher-level structures are necessary to allow different networks to communicate with each other and coordinate their activities. It is sufficient for the networks to be linked. Since communication is possible, and where there is a common interest to do something, whether for the network as a whole or parts thereof, it will be done. We...know...that networks imply a different way of dealing with each other. This includes the recognition that a network imply perception of a collective interest. Networks are not everything. There are many important policy issues that will need to be clarified. This will have to be done, however, as a part of the social movements. [Google-aided translation. PW]

The networking models and specifications above may help in initially distinguishing between networks with different information flows, but are insufficient, I think, for both analysis and strategizing.<sup>12</sup> Thus, even if we were to decide that LabourStart *was* a Star and NetzwerkIT a Fully-Connected network, this would only tell us about their information flows. It would hardly help us in dealing with the significance of the kind of information flowing, in what quantity, in which direction(s) and to what effect. Nor would it tell us about the ideology/ies or discourse(s) framing or framed by the flows. Nor would it allow us to identify possible contradictions within each model, nor problems confronting AILCC as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Further sophistication in the conceptualization of emancipatory networks is provided in a study of feminism and the global justice movement by Eschle and Maiguashca (2010:153). Here they distinguish between Globalised Think Tanks, Umbrella Organisations (with strong hubs), Cuckoo Organisations (where the hub moves between members), Tangled Webs (links in multiple directions, light or non-existent hub) and Hybrid Networks/Federations (affiliated groups with much affiliate autonomy).

<sup>13</sup> It occurred to me after completing this paper that I could and should have made reference to [Indymedia](#) as an international social movement communication model, one now with a decade of experience and about which there is a considerable literature. An early piece that comes to mind is that of Dorothy Kidd (2003). For further sources, use Google, Google Books or Google Scholar.

**Social Movements 2.0** is the title of the piece by Brecher, Costello and Smith (2010).<sup>14</sup> It has the advantage of being by alternative international *labour* communicators but to be talking about the social-movement:cyberspace relation more generally. Here are their positive points on social networking (YouTube, Twitter, etc). These, they argue, have the advantages in terms of

1. Group formation
2. Scale and amplification
3. Interactivity
4. Destruction of hierarchies
5. Cheapness and ease of tools

And these are the questions these applications pose about social networking for emancipatory purposes:

1. What does it mean when individuals begin organising outside and without the help of traditional organisations?
2. It's easy and cheap for organisations to bring people together into a swarm or smart mob, but what do you do with them then?
3. Will offline social movement organisations be willing to cede control as ordinary people increasingly leverage social networking tools to channel their own activities?
4. How do labor and social movement organisations address the dangers associated with online action?
5. How do we track the demographics of who's online and who's not and what tools they are using?
6. How do we present complex ideas online?
7. How does offline and online social movement building fit together?
8. How can social movements wield real power online?

These arguments for and questions about Web 2.0 are clearly relevant to social movements in cyberspace generally, and to what I would call the 'collective self-articulation of labour' in particular.<sup>15</sup> By my initial quotation, I have clearly

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<sup>14</sup> Compare with the item on trade unions and social networking by Carmel Wolfson (2008).

<sup>15</sup> A discovery too late to be worked into the body of this paper is a substantial piece on the World Social Forum and the web by Mayo Fuster Morell (forthcoming). Mayo, who has been engaged over the years in WSF and other online projects does not satisfy herself with showing the difficulties even pro-WSF unions have with the loss of control implied by cyberspace processes. Nor, for that matter, with showing that this fear of flying is shared with major NGOs and other hierarchically-structured

prioritised their Point 3. This is because of the hegemony of a particular and historically-specific institutional form, the 'trade-union-as-we-know-it',<sup>16</sup> over the 'labour-movement-as-a-whole'. The latter could be considered, in the language of Boaventura de Souza Santos (2004) as either 'invisible' or 'emergent'. But even though the trade-union-as-we-know-it only 'represents' (even in formal terms of membership) 10-15 percent of the world's workers, it is still commonly considered to 'represent' the (future of?) the other 85-90 percent.<sup>17</sup> The hegemony is so long-lived, wide and deep that most Left criticism of the trade union movement – North, South, East or West - *confines* itself to the trade unions and takes place in terms of their bad ideology ('reformism') and worse leadership ('bureaucracy').<sup>18</sup> Many of even innovatory international labour websites tend to reproduce the on-line trade union practice of either lacking open feedback, or confining and controlling discussion. Furthermore, the 'labour-movement-as-a-whole' really needs to be still considered the 'labour-movement-as-a-hole', in other words as a space waiting to be 'populated' (in Cyberian terminology). The kind of 'alternative' sites and projects listed above may represent an emergent online labour movement. But they are not

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bodies. She also shows at length, in detail, and with conceptual sophistication, the problems of 'scaling up' the so far limited cyberspace activities of both the WSF and the broader movement.

<sup>16</sup> The 2010 Congress of the ITUC provides a place and moment to consider how the world's major international trade union organization views both itself and its Others. Despite the limited percentage of the world's working classes under the ITUC umbrella, it spoke of itself (and was spoken about by both the dominant and alternative media) as if it were *the* voice of labour globally. It also seemed to consider itself the voice of the *people of the world*. The new kind of branding-conscious Congress slogan was 'Now the People – From The Crisis To Global Justice'. Yet Congress resolutions in practice reduced 'the people' to the unionised (and, now, those hypothetically unionisable). These members, in their vast majority, did not know that this Congress was occurring, far less what its decisions were. And, whilst representatives of the international financial institutions (surely those *responsible* for this crisis) were invited to address Congress, [speakers from 'political' and 'civil society'](#) appeared only on Day 3. The ITUC report suggested their function was more to assure than to challenge Congress. The representatives of the IMF and WTO had already spoken approvingly of the global role of the ITUC. There was little to distinguish the one visiting party from the other. The ITUC thus continues to sleep with or under the enemy whilst making a cautious nod to the more *salonfähig* (salon-acceptable) tendency within global civil society. It elected a new top leadership, including one woman, but almost all from Western capitalist liberal democracies.

<sup>17</sup> If I place 'represent' here within distancing quotes, this is because of my introductory quotation from Marianne Maeckelbergh, suggesting that networking enables us to surpass representative and even direct democracy.

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes Left criticism of the International Trade Union Confederation abandons even these conventional pejoratives, leaving one with the question of what 'Left' means today. This is the case with the (ex-)Communist *Comisiones Obreras* in Spain (Boix and Doz 2010) in a piece which manages to also abandon such conventional Left terms as 'capitalism' and 'socialism'. As for the US Communist-linked [People's Voice](#), it had no criticism to make of the ITUC Congress at all - leaving one with the question of what 'Communist' means today.

necessarily linked. Most will not even know of the *existence* of such others! And even if there is such recognition or networking, they may not be agreed about whether, for example, they do or should recognise themselves as autonomous from, alternatives to, or extensions of, the trade union movement.<sup>19</sup>

What Brecher, Costello and Smith do not consider are the implications of Web 2.0, or cyberspace more generally, for a new kind of labour *internationalism*. There are here real problems, for a radically-democratic communication practice, of 1) the concentration of internet initiatives in the North (see the countries of origin in the list above) and 2) of their domination by English – or German in the case of *NetzwerkIT*, *LabourNet Deutschland*, and Dutch in the case of [TIE Netherlands](#)). Even though many online and international labour projects are bi- or multilingual (with *LabourStart* again way out in front), and even though [Google Translate](#) allows for at least an impression of what a foreign text is about, there is still some time to go before shopfloor- or community-level labour activists are going to be able to literally understand and effectively communicate with each other. Then there is 3) the problem that most international union/labour solidarity sites assume 'solidarity' to mean primarily a relationship on the North/South *axis*, and in a North/South *direction*. This often leads to conflation of solidarity with 'development cooperation'. Whether motivated by discourses of 'development',<sup>20</sup> inspired by feelings of guilt or charity, or even notions of the noble (or revolutionary) savage, these are limited or one-sided orientations. Each of the three points above raises the necessity for a self-reflective and publicly self-critical attitude toward such activity. And this in turn raises the need also for a theory (or theories) of the emancipation of labour and of global social emancipation more generally. But before turning to such general issues I want to consider one more contribution to an understanding of the relationship between labour networking and international solidarity.

**The specificities of online labour activity.** My reference here is to a paper by Bruce Robinson (2008) which addresses the solidarity action campaigns of

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<sup>19</sup> Consider here Eric Lee's characterization of his institutionally separate project as 'the news and campaigning website of the international trade union movement', or that of Marc Belanger of the equally separate *RadioLabour* as 'the international labour movement's global radio station'. This could be dismissed as advertising copy. Yet, bearing in mind that they both tend to take the Global Unions family, and unions recognized by such, as the parameter of their operations, the claims will raise few eyebrows. On the other hand, in so far as their claims are accepted within the hegemonic union world and uncontested by alternatives, we have to recognize that both initiatives came from such organizationally independent entities! This suggests a broadening or loosening of the traditional control union organizations have tended to exercise over their communication activities.

<sup>20</sup> There was once, apparently, a lecturer in Latin American politics who required of his students that they not use the word 'populism'. Brilliant if cruel! I likewise consider 'development' an imprisoning, if not a poisoned, word and would like to see it referred to an International Court of Epistemological Justice. 'Development' discourse and practice is surely responsible for millions more deaths than Islamic and Zionist fundamentalism combined.

LabourStart (now called [ActNow!](#)). Alongside news, this feature seems to be considered by Eric Lee the most significant function of LabourStart. Robinson, who clearly appreciates this activity, employs a methodology that permits us to see its limitations and, therefore, the challenges it raises. He identifies the three major collective actors in cybersolidarity - the Protagonists, the Intermediaries and the Respondents (my capitalisation). There is also, of course, the Target aimed at. The Protagonists, or subjects, are those who are seeking solidarity, or on whose behalf solidarity action has been called for, and who are therefore there at the beginning and end of the action. The Intermediaries are a variety of communicators, most crucially the networkers. These carry out a range of functions, including:

Maintaining the infrastructure...that enables the dissemination of the information and the campaigning...initiating, monitoring and backing up the campaigns; and building and maintaining a constituency of potential participants... (Robinson 2008:158).

Moving on, Robinson also identifies the Respondents, in this case trade unionists, possessing the 'trade union...ethos of solidarity and internationalism and organisational identities as trade unionists' (159). This does not, of course, guarantee the success of a particular campaign (nor of campaigning in general?). In considering success, Robinson suggests two measures, one being the impact of the action on both the Protagonists and the Target, the other being the mobilisation of Respondents – in other words the number of those who have endorsed the campaign or sent emails. There is, he says, no necessary correlation between these two dimensions. One major problem of such online campaigning, Robinson argues is that:

Control of the actions is in the hands of the networkers rather than those directly affected by the outcome of the action....There is...a potential of conflict of interest here. The ability of the networkers to choose news and select which campaigns are taken up...lays them open to accusations of favouritism or censorship. (161).

Although he is not criticising LabourStart, Robinson does reveal Eric Lee's options here: that calls should come from 'an official trade union', that the best campaigns are those with the support of such union organisations, local, foreign or international. Finally, Robinson makes several references to the LabourNet model<sup>21</sup>, which favours worker-to-worker relations *regardless* of whether these are officially endorsed or not, and to

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<sup>21</sup> It should be pointed out that whilst there are various national LabourNets, the attempt to create a global ring of such seems, regrettably, to have run into the ground. The impression given from the list of other LabourNets and the UnionRing feature on the index page of [LabourNetUK](#) is that they do not significantly interact.

Open forums and many-to-many e-lists which have different methods of operation from the centralised one-to-many model embodied in email campaigns. (16)

And although Robinson seems to favour the kind of model suggested by Dave Hollis and NetzwerkIT, this suggestion is more implicit than explicit. But the main point I wanted to draw out of his piece is precisely the necessity for more specific conceptual and research tools when looking at the quite different kinds or functions of international labour communication online.

What needs specifying or broadening from the Robinson approach would be his classification - Protagonists, Intermediaries, Respondents and Targets - as also their application, here, primarily to the trade-unions-as-we-know-them. There is, at least in his classification, no consideration of feedback between Protagonists and Respondents, nor of the *meaning* given acts of solidarity at either end of the relationship. Nor is there the reality of much if not most of effective international labour solidarity today – the address to and involvement of the general public or, more specifically, of what is today called Global Civil Society.

## 5. Concepts and strategies

In this somewhat loose series of recollections, analyses, literature reviews and criticism, I am aware of having talked somewhat glibly about 'alternatives', 'internationalism', 'emancipation' and 'solidarity', of having failed signally to specify the meaning of 'trade-unionism-as-we-know-it' (TUAWKI?), and of having pointed toward some unspecified future of a new networked labour internationalism. I have written about these extensively elsewhere and refer the interested to such [sources](#). I should, however say at least a little more about TUAWKI, the emancipation of labour, global social emancipation and the relationship between ICT and internationalism.

*TUAWKI*. We may start with this critique of the contemporary trade union form, as 'organising for defeat', from Canadian union officer, [Brian Green](#):

what we understand to be the trade union is an organizational form that originally emerged to serve the needs of a very particular group of workers – white, "skilled," and male – whose relative privilege in comparison with other workers was threatened with the ascent of industrial capitalism and the Fordist mass worker. Insofar as that model was expanded and reconfigured after the 1930s, the labour movement consolidated its victories in a tripartite industrial relations regime that acknowledged the legitimacy of workers' demands only as they facilitated productivity increases and were pegged to a steady rate of profit. When, once again, a political recomposition of global working class struggles effectively challenged the limits of entitlement in the



post-1968 era, the trade union model was thrown into crisis not only by its lack of preparation or the political conservatism of some of its members, but precisely because its organizational structure and strategic vision were thoroughly bound up with the tripartite model and with the Keynesian compromise.

Brian Green's critique is addressed, actually, to North American trade unionism, though it could be taken as extending implicitly to unionism in industrialised capitalist liberal democracies more generally. Given, however, the appeal of this 'developed' model to unions and unionised parts of working classes in peripheral capitalist countries, given the systematic promotion of this by the social-partnership International Labour Organisation, and given that unions in Communist states were themselves incorporated into what might be called a social<sup>ist</sup>-partnership with their ruling parties and authoritarian states, the critique has quasi-universal application. Thus, even such previously radical-nationalist, Left or socialist union centres as Solidarnosc in Poland, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores in Brazil and the Cosatu in South Africa, have been largely incorporated into the hegemonic global model.

*The emancipation of labour.* There is a long but almost forgotten tradition in the labour movement which calls for the abolition/surpassing of the wage relationship (aka wage slavery). This is the direct or indirect manner (sub-contracting, the 'family wage' supposedly covering the housewife) through which capitalism exploits labour, reducing it to a commodity. One can find this call in the documents of the [First International](#), in the very name of the first [Marxist political organization](#) in Russia, in the Preamble to the Constitution of the anarcho-syndicalist [Industrial Workers of the World](#). A revival of this tradition, and its re-specification in the light of a globalised networked capitalism - and in relation to the GJ&SM - is overdue.<sup>22</sup>

*Global social emancipation.* I take my text here from a major research project with the title, [Reinventing Social Emancipation](#):

The paradigm of social emancipation developed by western modernity is undergoing a deep and final crisis. Social emancipation must, therefore, be reinvented. It must be understood as a form of counter-hegemonic globalization relying on local-global linkages and alliances among social groups around the world which go on resisting social exclusion, exploitation and oppression caused by hegemonic neoliberal globalization. Such struggles result in the development of alternatives to the exclusionary and monolithic logic of global capitalism, that is to say, spaces of democratic participation, non-capitalistic production of

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<sup>22</sup> My own attempt to do so, in a [Global Labour Charter Project](#), has been damned with the faintest of praise, even by close friends. You have been warned.

goods and services, creation of emancipatory knowledges, post-colonial cultural exchanges, new international solidarities.

*ICT and internationalism.* I failed above to mention that the full title of my 1992 paper was 'International Labour Communication by Computer: *A Fifth International?* Its conclusion was, summarily, that if we had ILCC we would not need a Fifth International! Unfortunately, this conclusion has not been drawn by even the radical Left, which was trying in 2010 to recreate a state-dependent and institutionalised international (Waterman 2010). Moreover, as I have just said, any emancipatory global labour movement network has not yet come into existence. And, finally, it seems that union, labour movement, political and academic reflection about the matter has – with exceptions – hardly advanced beyond the early wave during which that 1992 paper was written.

### **Conclusion: What is to be done?**

This paper has been intended as a provocation to further research on ILCC. And, obviously, to further provoke dialogue on the matter. So, drawing on another paper from that period (Waterman 2001), let me, in conclusion, offer

### **26 propositions on networking, labour and solidarity under/against/beyond a globalised and informatised capitalism**

1. Networking is becoming the dominant 'relational form' under capitalism;
2. It is a highly contradictory form which can, however, be more fully, creatively and democratically used by popular, radical-democratic and anti-capitalist forces;
3. Notions of networking and internationalism, understood as necessary for modernisation and/or human emancipation, can be traced back to at least the time of the French and Industrial Revolutions. Since that time they have been a matter of political dispute between capitalists/technocrats/authoritarians and socialists/democrats/libertarians;
4. Networking is the most ancient, common, and therefore popular ('of the people'), relational form, today given worldwide reach and capacity for both domination and emancipation;
5. It engenders new forms of work, workers, products and enterprises, with anti- or even post-capitalist potential;
6. The general understanding of networking in the international labour movement is a limited one;

7. It surpasses the traditional organisational forms (union, party) in so far as it allows for the articulation (joining, expression) of both general and particular interests within and between working classes – and others;
8. The organisation:networking relation should be understood neither as a binary opposition, nor as one of vice versus virtue, but as a dialectical one, in which labour organisations and institutions may survive and even flourish to the extent that they understand and adapt to the logic of the network;
9. CMC is not only a *tool* but also a *community* (cyberspace - meaning new supra-national and even supra-terrestrial places, with their own (disputed or disputable) laws, traditions and values, and also *utopia* (a not yet existing but desirable place, to be imagined and created));
10. Networking is not simply an aspect or process within capitalism but also a way of understanding (and therefore surpassing) capitalism, racism, sexism, militarism, environmental destruction, etc;
11. The networking form allows for the development of a new and complex global solidarity movement surpassing the limited or failed inter/nationalisms of the now-passing national-industrial capitalist era;
12. In so far as networking is a communicational rather than an organisational form, it is itself articulated with the media and culture, which are becoming increasingly central to both capitalist society and social movements, implying for the latter that any new internationalism is increasingly a communicative and cultural matter.
13. If it is to become relevant to labour internationalism in the era of globalisation, the pyramidal international union organisation must be transformed into an information, advice and support service that stimulates multi-directional and multi-level contacts between workers, unions and the labour movement generally. (The same holds for non-labour internationals);
14. The challenge confronting international union organisations is not only a networked capitalism and the networked state: it is also the networked anti-capitalist, anti-statist, anti-globalisation movement;
15. If not informed by a broader vision or leadership, international labour networking can reinforce an enterprise or corporate identity and undermine broader solidarity;
16. The new electronic media make possible and necessary a new kind of fe/male labour activist, reaching out beyond the enterprise and the union office, listening to, linking waged-workers up with, and empowering, the increasing number of 'foreign', 'marginal' and other 'a-typical' workers;
17. The form taken by contemporary democratic international movements – networked, flexible, media-oriented and communication-sensitive - suggests

the future model for an effective international labour movement in the age of globalisation;

18. The notion that international electronic networking is the inevitable province of the rich and privileged, or has to be diffused from the rich, advanced, developed countries/unions/people, to the poor, marginal and powerless ones is questioned by certain Third World experiences, emancipatory movements and even technological developments;
19. The desirability of the networked electronic union appears to be required by the nature of labour in the information industries but is today possible and even necessary for all working people, and for any effective international solidarity;
20. The potential of the electronic media is not so much their capacity to 'mobilise' working people within and for the old labour institutions, but to make them 'more mobile' under and against a globalised and networked capitalism more generally;
21. There must be a dialectical interplay, in a new international labour movement, between the politics of cyberspace and the politics of place, inspired by a meaningful understanding of solidarity;
22. Globalisation, computerisation and informatisation make it possible and necessary for the international labour movement to rethink 'work' and the wage-labour relationship in terms, for example, of locally-relevant, ecologically-friendly, cooperatively-controlled but high-tech production;
23. Development of a networked labour internationalism requires political action by the labour movement – in partnership with civil society - in/against the institutions/arenas in which control is exercised over the technology, access to and the content of electronic media and cyberspace;
24. An understanding of the international labour movement in network terms can break down the traditional division of labour within the movement, between the categories of 'thinkers' and 'doers';
25. Those who consider that the future of the labour movement lies in networking are going to have to meet the widespread feeling, within and around the movement, that - unlike other social movements – labour needs its institutions and that this need is justified;
26. The development of networking within the international labour movement would be stimulated by the production and circulation of a declaration or discussion document, expressed in language accessible to not only the computer savvy but also internationalist activists beyond.

Two final points.

Firstly, Point 26 has for me the highest priority and is surely the easiest to achieve. Whilst I do not feel inclined to myself draft such a document, I can assure such drafts and discussion place/space on the [ReinventingLabour](#) blog. Here, incidentally, there can already be found a not unrelated charter on [Citizens' and Artists' Rights in the Digital Age](#).

Secondly, anyone who failed to receive (or received but failed to answer) my survey invitation when initially posted should feel free to respond now. The questions can be found in *Appendix 1*.

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## **Appendix 1: Survey Instrument**

1. How would you describe or characterise your own international labour media project, including a) how it differs from or adds to traditional trade-union media, b) how it relates not only to such but also to other alternative international media projects.
2. How would you characterise your activity? Do you consider yourself an 'international labour media activist'? If not, what? How do you relate to others like yourself? And to trade unionists and/or other kinds of labour activists?
3. What are the challenges, problems and issues that alternative labour media have raised for the trade unions and/or other forms of labour and/or social movement activism?
4. Do you consider 'alternative international labour media' (or however you wish to characterise your field of activity) gender neutral? Or does it reproduce the discourse and practices of traditional patriarchal media?
5. Do you consider that technical criteria and the logic of the media production in which you are involved influence or actually limit your efforts to treat your medium (or media) as the voice of working people (also beyond the unions) or, to put it another way, of international labour protest in general?
6. In so far as you consider your activity as 'internationalist', how does this a) relate to traditional internationalist labour communication/culture, and b) relate to a novel kind of labour or social-movement communicational/cultural internationalism?
7. How do you support yourself financially and how are your projects funded? To what extent, if any, are such sources of income a constraint on what you would like to do?
8. Do you have a problem with these questions? Feel free to replace, or add to, them!



## **Appendix 2:**

### **List of Labour-Related Online Projects, Mid-2010**

**(Geographic bases indicated in square brackets where available)**

- [Asia Monitor Resource Centre](#). 'to support and contribute towards the building of a strong, democratic, and independent labour movement in Asia by understanding and responding to the multiple challenges of asserting workers' rights to jobs, decent working conditions, and gender consciousness, while following a participatory framework'. [Hong Kong].
- [Australia Asia Worker Links](#). 'Workers Change the World'. [Australia].
- [Basic Income Earth Network \(BIEN\)](#). 'serves as a link between individuals and groups committed to or interested in basic income and fosters informed discussion on this topic throughout the world'. (Belgium).
- [Border Thinking on Migration, Trafficking and Commercial Sex](#). Blog of writer and activist, Laura Agustin. [Western Europe?].
- [China Labour Bulletin](#). 'A proactive outreach organisation that seeks to defend and promote the rights of workers in China. We have extensive links and wide-ranging co-operative programs with labour groups, law firms and academics throughout China, as well as with the international labour movement'. [Hong Kong].
- [China Labour Net](#). 'Our understanding of the labour movement and workers' rights extends beyond union rights and economic rights, it includes the emancipation of labour'. [Hong Kong].
- [December 18](#). 'advocates for a world where migrants are not discriminated against because of their sex, race, colour, language, religion or conviction, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, nationality, age, economic position, property, marital status, birth or any other status.' [Belgium]
- [Degrowth Declaration Barcelona 2010](#). Academics, activists and practitioners met in Barcelona to structure proposals toward an alternative, ecologically sustainable and socially equitable degrowth society. The conference was conducted in an inclusive and participatory way. In addition to standard scientific presentations, some 29 working groups discussed hands-on policies for degrowth and defined research questions, bringing together economic, social and environmental concerns. [Spain]

- [Global Labour Strategies](#). 'to contribute to building global labor solidarity through research, analysis, strategic thinking, and network building around labor and employment issues...[L]abor movements and their allies around the world are at a watershed moment...The choice for unions and worker organisations everywhere is to adapt to global realities and build a global labor movement or decline into irrelevance'. [USA].
- [Global Network of Sex Work Projects \(NSWP\)](#). 'established as an informal alliance in 1992 by a group of sex worker rights activists working within sex work projects around the world...has influenced policy and built leadership among sex workers and facilitated the development of regional and national networks of sex workers and sex work projects. [UK]
- [International Alliance of Inhabitants](#). 'Creating A Common Global Space Of Solidarity For Urban Social Movements...for the unity of urban social movements which strive to give concrete expression to economic, social and cultural rights, as well as housing rights in particular. It is launched by the organisations and networks of inhabitants, co-operatives, tenants' unions, community centres, original populations and committees for housing rights all over the world'. [Spain?].
- [International Centre for Union Rights](#). 'an organising and campaigning body...defending and improving the rights of trade unions and trade unionists throughout the world'. [UK].
- [International Committee in Support of Fishworkers](#). 'an international non-governmental organisation that works towards the establishment of equitable, gender-just, self-reliant and sustainable fisheries, particularly in the small-scale, artisanal sector.[India/Belgium]
- [International Dockworkers Council](#). 'an association formed by organisations of dockworkers from all over the world. It is defined by its basic principles as being a unitary, independent, democratic, assembly-based working-class organisation'. [Spain].
- [LaborTech](#). 'bringing to bring together labour video, computer and media activists in the US and from around the world to build and develop labour communication technology and media....We believe that a critical task for labor is building a labor communication media movement that can tell our stories and break the corporate information blockade in every corner of the world'. [USA].
- [LabourNet Deutschland/Germany](#). [Google-aided translation] 'the trade-union meeting place, linking those with and without a job...We are part of the global LabourNet initiatives, interested in the positive aspects of the new technologies for use in an emancipatory manner. [Germany]

- [Maquila Solidarity Network](#) – ‘A labor and women’s rights organisation that supports the efforts of workers in global supply chains to win improved wages and working conditions and a better quality of life’. [Canada/Mexico]
- [Minga Alternativa de Movimientos Sociales](#). ‘una iniciativa de comunicación impulsada por diversas redes y coordinaciones sociales de América Latina y el Caribe, que se han planteado unir fuerzas y buscar respuestas conjuntas en este plano, entendiendo que la comunicación es estratégica para la acción social’. [Ecuador].
- [New Unionism Network](#). ‘New unionism is about [organizing](#), [internationalism](#) and [workplace democracy](#). Bringing these together requires [creativity](#). Taken together, this is the practice of New Unionism [...] This means that unions need to listen. It means shifting union HQ down into the workplace. It means engaging around issues that members choose, irrespective of traditional ‘management prerogatives’. Most importantly, it means challenging the master-servant relationship at work. This involves linking up with colleagues across company supply chains, within social movements, and beyond national borders. [France/UK].
- [No Sweat](#). ‘No Sweat exists to fight against sweatshop exploitation. We organise solidarity for sweatshop workers from the UK to the four corners of the world. We stand for workers’ self-organisation, international solidarity and for the right to organise in every workplace’. (UK).
- [Organizing a Labor Movement for the 21st Century: US Social Forum 2010](#). Programme of labour workshops at USSF, Detroit, June, 2010. A one-off event but providing basic information and email addresses relating to a wide spread of workshops. [US]
- [This Tuesday - Logs on Migrations, Labour, Transnational Organising](#) ‘gathers best-practice information about organisations, projects and campaigns mobilising and researching contingent and migrant labor. We hope this information contributes to the construction of a powerful movement that integrates workers, their organisations, supporters, net activists and independent media’. [?????]
- [Radio Labour](#). ‘the international labour movement’s global radio station. Its audiocasts are available on the RadioLabour website, Facebook, iTunes and community radio stations around the world’ [Canada].
- [Red de Mujeres Trabajadores Sexuales de Latinoamérica y el Caribe](#). Haciendo el trabajo sexual visible para la inclusión. [Argentina]
- [Reinventing Labour](#). ‘for people...who seek a space to share ideas and resources regarding challenges and potentials to strengthen a vibrant, critical, plural and emancipatory movement of all kinds of working people

everywhere – a movement intimately related to the new 'global justice and solidarity movement'. [Canada/Netherlands].

- [Respect and Rights for Domestic Workers](#). 'web site of the International Domestic Workers' Network (IDWN), an initiative of domestic workers' unions together with support organisations'. (Switzerland).
- [Sendika.Org/LabourNet-Turkey](#). 'aims to contribute to...the labor unions to renew themselves and to become more democratic; the creation of a joint union movement;...the building of a new labor movement which will be a part of the international labor movement. To fulfill the above tasks in the electronic media, it has set as its goal to become a reference, an information-document resource and a platform for all activists who wish to contribute to this process'. (Turkey)
- [SolEcoPedia](#). 'The Shared International Encyclopedia for Solidarity and Social Economy'. [France?]
- [Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights](#). 'an active and living voice of workers in the Global South representing a diverse and broad spectrum of trade unions committed to global economic justice which seeks to inspire ordinary workers to take up and intensify class struggles against the exploitative system of neoliberal globalisation and the increased suffering of workers and communities in all our countries'. [Australia].
- [Transnationals Information Exchange – Germany](#). 'a global grassroots network of workers active in workplaces and communities. It includes both union and non-union activists in the formal and informal sectors. tie aims to encourage, organise, and facilitate international consciousness and cooperation among workers and their organisations in various parts of the world'. [Germany].
- [StreetNetInternational](#). 'to promote the exchange of information and ideas on critical issues facing street vendors and market vendors and hawkers (mobile vendors) and on practical organising and advocacy strategies'. [South Africa].
- [Via Campesina](#). 'the international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workers. We defend the values and the basic interests of our members. We are an autonomous, pluralist and multicultural movement, independent of any political, economic, or other type of affiliation'. [Indonesia].
- [Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising](#) ('The common motivation for those who join the network is the relative lack of recognition, understanding, and support for the working poor in the

informal economy, especially women, by policy makers, economic planners, and the international development community'. [USA/UK].

- [World March of Women](#). 'an international feminist action movement connecting grass-roots groups and organisations working to eliminate the causes at the root of poverty and violence against women...Our values and actions are directed at making political, economic and social change. They centre on the globalisation of solidarity; equality between women and men, among women themselves and between peoples; the respect and recognition of diversity among women; the multiplicity of our strategies; the appreciation of women's leadership; and the strength of alliances among women and with other progressive social movements. [Brazil]
- [WomenWorkingWorldwide](#). 'works with an international network of women workers...Our central ethos is that it is women themselves who are calling for change in their working conditions and networks such as WWW can make sure that their voices are heard and not ignored. [UK]
- [World Social Forum Labour and Globalisation List](#). List of unions and other labour organisations identified with the World Social Forum and the global justice and solidarity movement. [Italy]

### **About the author**

Peter Waterman (London 1936) worked for the international Communist movement in the 1950s and '60s. Through the 1970s-90s, he was a left academic-activist on labour and social movements. In the late-1980s he initiated the international debate on 'social movement unionism'. Now retired, he writes on international labour, the WSF and the global justice and solidarity movement. He is published widely, in English and other languages, in print and on the web (see <http://reinventinglabour.wordpress.com> and <http://blog.choike.org/eng/category/peter-waterman>. He can be contacted at [peterwaterman1936 AT gmail.com](mailto:peterwaterman1936@gmail.com)