

The international labour movement in, against and beyond, the globalized and informatized cage of capitalism and bureaucracy¹

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Abstract

Six questions and answers address the present crisis of the hegemonic, Europe-based and Western-centric international trade union organisations, the impact of globalisation, neo-liberalisation, informalisation and informatisation on labour internationalism, the experiences and possibilities of informal/alternative kinds of labour internationalism, and the significance of labour solidarity with Palestine.

Much scepticism is expressed concerning the capacities and possibilities of the traditional trade union internationals. But this is also the case with the union presence within the World Social Forum. Attention is drawn to certain alternative international(ist) labour movement initiatives, mostly marked by networking forms. And the challenges facing a new labour internationalism are considered with respect to the Palestinian case.

Keywords: union, Eurocentrism, restructuring, globalisation, internationalism, World Social Forum, shopfloor, informatisation, networking, solidarity

¹ This piece began as a response to a number of personal questions posed by Indian feminist and labour specialist Amrita Chhachhi. She had been editing a special issue of the journal of the International Institute of Social Studies, *Development and Change* on labour internationally (Chhachhi 2014). When I could not meet the D&C requirements, I decided to expand it for this special issue of *Interface*. Although Amrita can now hardly be considered responsible for it, I do appreciate her original stimulus.

Weber's Iron Cage

There will be an evolution of an iron cage, which will be a technically ordered, rigid, dehumanized society...The iron cage is the one set of rules and laws that we are all subjected and must adhere to. Bureaucracy puts us in an iron cage, which limits individual human freedom and potential instead of a "technological utopia" that should set us free. It is the way of the institution, where we do not have a choice anymore. Once capitalism came about, it was like a machine that you were being pulled into without an alternative option; currently, whether we agree or disagree, if you want to survive you need to have a job and you need to make money².

Widening the Cracks Within Capitalism

In the last twenty or thirty years we find a great many movements that claim something else: it is possible to emancipate human activity from alienated labor by opening up cracks where one is able to do things differently, to do something that seems useful, necessary, and worthwhile to us; an activity that is not subordinated to the logic of profit. [...]We are victims and yet we are not. We seek to improve our living standards as workers, and also to go beyond that, to live differently. In one respect we are, in effect, people who have to sell their labor power in order to survive. But in another, each one of us has dreams, behaviors and projects that don't fit into the capitalist definition of labor. [...] The difficulty ... lies in envisioning the relation between those two types of movements [wage labour and living differently]. How can that relation avoid reproducing the old sectarianism? How can it be a fruitful relation without denying the fundamental differences between the two perspectives?³

1. To what extent has the international trade union movement responded to the challenges of neo-liberal globalization?

The largest union international, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) held its Third Congress, Berlin, May 2014. But the Congress website suggested that the ITUC was still living in or looking back toward the 'kinder, gentler' West European capitalism of the mid-20th Century.⁴ The Congress slogan was 'Building Workers' Power', symbolized by a male worker in a hard hat. Women, the 'Informal Sector' and the Indigenous did not appear on the agenda but only in non-plenary sessions. Although a Draft Statement declared that 'The 20th century model of capitalism has failed, and the 'Washington Consensus' must be buried forever'⁵, its three main themes were:

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iron_cage

³ <http://roarmag.org/2014/09/john-holloway-cracking-capitalism-vs-the-state-option/>

⁴ <http://congress2014.ituc-csi.org/?lang=en>

⁵ http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/html/index_en_web.html

Union Growth
Realizing Rights
Sustainable Jobs

This might be compared with the World Social Forum's

Another World is Possible!

the Spanish campaign for

Real Democracy Now!

with Occupy's

We Are the 99%!

the Latin American indigenous movements' identification of a

Crisis of Civilisation⁶

and the simple but potent slogan

Capitalism is not in Crisis, Capitalism is the Crisis!⁷

It seems to me that ITUC's slogan and symbol are hardly going to mobilise or reach out beyond the unionized – if even these.⁸ The ITUC's Congress issues suggested, rather, those of what the Dutch unions have long called themselves - 'an interest-representing organization'.

The ITUC is based in Western Europe, is profoundly Eurocentric, and a fundamentally defensive organization. It has long forgotten any history of labour's 'street-fighting days'. It clearly does not believe in the strategy attributed to Clausewitz that the best means of defence is attack. And it cannot publicly confront the fact that the unionized part of the world's wage labour force is only between seven and 15 percent.⁹

Then there is its fear – indeed suppression - of dialogue. When a unique public challenge was made to it by the South African national union centre,¹⁰ it didn't

⁶ <http://transform-network.net/journal/issue-082011/news/detail/Journal/at-the-heart-of-the-crisis-of-civilisation-the-issue-of-living-well.html>.

⁷ It's a movie, it's free and it's on Utube [here](#).

⁸ The ITUC has been producing international surveys on major labour questions. I am no specialist opinion surveys but it does occur to me that the [latest one](#) was intended to confirm rather than challenge the actions and opinions of those who commissioned it. There is here, for example, no question about whether those surveyed know anything about the ITUC, including where it is sited, who its leaders might be, the name of their national ITUC affiliate, or what ITUC policies might be. The survey results, moreover, do not even indicate what percentage of interviewees were union members and whether their attitudes might differ from those of non-members! An expert analysis of these surveys would be welcome.

⁹ I have for some years been using the higher figure, but the lower one has been recently confirmed publicly by the General Secretary of the South African COSATU, and in a personal exchange with a veteran international union leader.

¹⁰ <http://www.unionbook.org/profiles/blogs/cosatu-first-substantial-and>

even bother to publicly respond. At its 2014 Congress it provided *plenary time* to such representatives of ‘the Great and the Good’ as Guy Ryder, the ex-ITUC(!) Director of the International Labour Organization (ILO), Helen Clark of the United Nations Development Programme, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, German Foreign Minister (!) and Gordon Brown, ex-Prime Minister of the UK (representative of yet another *inter-state* organization).¹¹ Why does it exhibit such a clientelist orientation? Where here were the representatives of ‘global civil society’, of the dramatic global social movements that are receiving not only public attention globally but very considerable public approval?

Such concerns may have appeared in Congress *workshops*, the latter paying at least some attention to domestic workers, to the ‘informal economy’, to climate change, migrant workers, violence against women, the retired, and of the unions ‘partnering’ (upwards again?) for ‘development’. All these elements, plus the audio-visual, electronic and TV-presentation elements in a ‘paperless congress’, suggest the ITUC has been pushed by the current crisis and pulled by the newest global social movements to move from obeisance to the international financial institutions towards some kind of critique of neo-liberalism (though not of capitalism).¹²

But why, if this congress represented 176 million workers, in some 161 Countries, and if the ITUC is, as Gordon Brown stated, the largest democratic movement in the world, did it witness such limited resonance in either Germany or internationally, in either the dominant or alternative inter/national labour media? I asked Google to alert me to anything on the ITUC Congress. Over about a week from June 24, I got four alerts, mostly from the ITUC press department itself, with one or two from Deutsche Welle, the international radio/TV service of the German state. Such reports from national union media that I myself found were mostly about their own participation or the speeches of their representatives. So on the basis of the evidence at time of writing, one has to conclude that the ITUC is the largest *invisible* democratic organization in the world. Compare dominant and/or alternative media response to Amnesty International campaigns or Greenpeace actions!

¹¹ This is a marginal improvement over the Second ITUC Congress in Vancouver, 2010, where plenary invitees included Strauss-Kahn, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund. And this whilst a massive anti-globalisation demonstration was occurring (and being violently repressed) elsewhere in Canada!

¹² For forceful critique of capitalism at the ITUC Congress, we have to again turn to the South African COSATU. The problem here, however, is that this alternative orientation not only clearly failed to impact on the congress but to itself reach the media. Whilst the COSATU President’s (overly diplomatic?) address to the congress was at least reported on the [COSATU website](#), Its more radical, substantial and detailed positions on congress issues could, at time of writing, only be found on UnionBook, [here](#) (note its attachments). For a conceptualization of the position of the ITUC in a schema of union responses to *neo-liberalism*, consider that of Gall, Wilkinson and Hurd (2011:9-10): 1) Agreement and Support; 2) Qualification and Conditional Support; 3) Social Democratic Opposition; 4) Socialist Resistance. Whilst it would seem reasonable to put the ITUC somewhere between positions 2 and 3, I am not sure whether a spectrum is sufficient to allow for alternatives to capitalism that do not even use the word ‘socialism’.

The ITUC is, however, the major union international, having merged earlier social democratic and catholic ones (here un-capitalized since their original ideological inspirations have long faded) and absorbing not only the main national union centres of the post-communist world but also major militant centres in the global South, such as those of Brazil, South Africa and South Korea.¹³ But the ITUC, its allied internationals and its members have been severely damaged by a capitalist tsunami that has been not only neo-liberal and globalized but also informatized (though this informatization was hardly recognized by its 2014 congress).

Much of what the ITUC and family do is on the North-Rest Axis (the Global South, the ex-Communist East), operates in a North-Rest direction and is conflated with Northern state-funded 'development cooperation' (consider here again the ITUC Congress workshop on this topic).¹⁴ The ITUC in any case assumes that the Rest is 'developing' or 'emerging', that what it needs is what the West has got or values, and that this is what the Rest desires. In 2013 I attended two international solidarity events of the Dutch trade unions, both cheerfully marked by this 'Solidarity of Substitution' (standing in for the victim) syndrome.¹⁵ I do recognise this as an *aspect* of solidarity, but I certainly reject the *reduction* of solidarity to something so ethically close to 19th century middle-class Christian charity, and inevitably structured on patron-client lines. (More on this later).

Capitalism, red in tooth and claw, within and outside industry, in the media and culture, off and online, has to be understood as revolutionary (if you prefer, *counter*-revolutionary) in carrying out a one-sided and till-now virtually unlimited war in which the traditional working class has been dispersed, restructured, outsourced, and in which its traditional forms (the Union, the Party, the Cooperative, the Newspaper, the Culture) have been reduced in size, and/or their position within the economy the polity, and in their socio-cultural impact.

I have proposed the following parable.

¹³ This is not to ignore exceptions, such as those of the impressively strike- and protest-prone Chinese and South African working classes. But the former are still outside the ITUC, and the ITUC-affiliated South African COSATU was, at time of writing, under an innovatory left challenge from its major industrial affiliate, the Nation Union of Metal Workers of South Africa (Marshall 2014). The possible implications of both phenomena for a post-ITUC labour internationalism have yet to be considered. And we should not forget signs of new union cross-border strike action within Europe (Nowak and Gallas 2014).

¹⁴ For what solidarity activities European ITUC affiliates are carrying out on a primarily West-West axis see the insightful but sobering account of Bieler and Erne (2014).

¹⁵ I was a participant at the launch of a Dutch union-funded (actually Dutch state development cooperation funded) film entitled 'Working Class Heroes'. One of these heroes, present at the launch, and awarded a Dutch Union Rights award, was a prominent and charismatic Indonesian union leader, [Said Iqbal](#). In 2014, [Iqbal identified himself - and his union\(s\)](#) - with the (losing) Presidential candidate – a man with a background in the Suharto military dictatorship! Also present at the launch was the Dutch Labour Party Minister of both development cooperation and foreign trade. Enough said.

The Capitalists and the Unions meet in the traditional World Labour Cup. The Unions arrive, all kitted up, from shirts to boots. But they find, to their horror, that the customary green pitch has been replaced by a shiny white skating rink. They protest loudly but the Capitalists say, 'This is New Football, it's faster, it's more profitable, so get your skates on or go away'. The Unions complain to the Referee but he hoists his shoulders and says, 'What can I do? If I make it an issue, they'll simply move the match somewhere else'.

The analogy is, of course, incomplete: the capitalists are playing not on an ice rink but in cyberspace. And the unions are still primarily orientated to the industrial/office worker identified with grounded workplaces, local living spaces, national politics.

The problem is that the basic form of labour self-articulation, the union, was developed in and against a capitalism that was industrial, national, state-building, centralizing (and, of course, patriarchal, racist, imperial and militaristic). Its colonies and dependencies were expected to 'develop' along this path. Or, conversely, after 1917, to follow the State-Communist path to such.¹⁶ A contradictory and volatile combination of these two paths can be found in China, the new Workshop of the World.

The inter/national 'trade union as we know it' (let's call it the TUWKI), is a pyramidal institution, assumes the archetypical proletarian - male, industrial, waged, condemned to life-time (un- or under-) employment, living in a working-class community, surrounded by a working-class culture. The pyramidal organization is a nominally representative-democratic one, just as are, supposedly, worker's parties, parliaments and the liberal-democratic state. The assumption was that with the growth, spread and deepening of capitalism the worker's numbers, needs and values would permeate society and the state. This aspiration was given its best - but always partial - representation in the capitalist welfare state (Wahl 2011). With the gradual undermining of Welfare Capitalism (and the dramatic destruction of its Communist would-be equivalent), and with the diverse 'global justice and solidarity movements' mostly taking networked and cyberspatial form, the inter/national TUWKI resembles more a monument to the past of emancipatory social movements than a model of a future one.¹⁷

¹⁶ There were other international labour movement traditions that were crushed between these two millstones, such as the anarcho-syndicalist, the council communist and other democratic socialist ones. I am reminded of these by two recent books. One is that of Dan Gallin (2014), one-time Secretary of the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF), who belonged to and reminds us of a particular democratic socialist tradition. The other is edited by Immanuel Ness (2014), which deals with such traditions in both their historical and contemporary manifestations - North and South, East and West. Such tendencies are - in so far as they surpass their own 'labourist' assumptions - making their own contribution to the re-invention of the union movement.

¹⁷ Detailed data and convincing additional reasons for the profound crisis of the international labour movement are provided by Marcel van der Linden (2015).

Finally, at global level, the inter/national unions – North, South, East and West – are incorporated and self-subordinated to the structure, ideology and programmes of the ILO – condemned by a leading former official, Guy Standing, as ‘An Agency for Globalization’ (Standing 2008). Since the ILO’s foundation – with enthusiastic union support – after the First World War and Russian Revolution, this famously ‘tripartite’ organization has been one in which governments and employers (State and Capital in political-economic terms) have 75 percent of the power, Labour 25 percent. ‘Labour’ here means only trade unions recognized by ‘their’ governments, which also actually *pay* for their unions’ presence at ILO conferences! This structure reproduces the Social-Liberal theory of capital and labour as competing interests, requiring a neutral state to preside over them. From here also comes the ideal of ‘free tripartite collective bargaining’, a model worshipped, or at least accepted, by most unions, North, South, East and West.

The contemporary inter/national trade unions can still mount defensive action and organize effective solidarity campaigns (for their affiliates). With their millions of members they cannot be dismissed. But, given the Iron Cage that surrounds their thinking and action, one has to conclude that within this church there is no salvation - or at least no emancipation. The best one can hope for is that the TUWKI will eventually learn from the newest wave of emancipatory social movements. However the Berlin Congress website reveals but a marginal recognition of even the growing number of women workers (headscarved rather than hardhatted?), of the mass of labourers in the petty-commodity sector, of the wave of precarization threatening labour even in its West European fortress, and that capitalism is destroying the environment on which human existence – and therefore inevitably trade unions and collective bargaining - depends.

2. Given the restructuring of work/labour, informalization, migration etc. is there any real basis for international labour solidarity?

Well, first we need to recognize the extent, forms and limits of past labour internationalisms.¹⁸ We also have to recognize the different times and places in, with or from which, internationalisms were expressed or experienced. I pluralize ‘internationalisms’ in order to avoid homogenization. Even in their iconic forms and moments they had their specificities and limitations. One of these lies in the very concept of *internationalism* (or, if you prefer, *internationalism*). There is ambiguity here even in the *Communist Manifesto*, which at one point asserts that workers have no country, and at another that they will first have to take power nationally.¹⁹ Etymologically, as well as

¹⁸ Considerable help here is provided by the work of David Featherstone (2012), reviewed [here](#). Featherstone is all the more important for those working on labour internationalism because of his consideration of multiple kinds of such solidarity, of both historical and contemporary cases, and because of his sensitivity to socio-geographic space and distance.

¹⁹<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>

historically, labour internationalism has been a relationship between workers identified by nationality, interpellated (hailed or addressed) by nationalists and identified with various types of nationalism (e.g. American patriotism, left populism in Latin America, 'great nation chauvinism' in Communist - and evidently - post-Communist, Russia and China).

With the development of centralized states, imperialism and inter-state or inter-bloc wars, workers and unions often opted for a state-national or bloc (Western, Eastern, Southern) identity rather than an international class one. We also need to distinguish worker, union, and party/ideological (Labour, Socialist, Communist, Anarchist) internationalisms. Everyone refers to the failure of the call for a general strike against World War One, when, with exceptions, workers identified themselves – at least initially – rather as national subjects/citizens than as an international class. But even the path-breaking 19th to early-20th century international campaign for the eight-hour day, 40-hour week, intimately linked with the establishment of Mayday as International Workers' Day, was never universalized. In other cases it has been reversed. And I observed and photographed an enormous Mexico City Mayday demonstration, some 15 years ago, in which space was provided for the Zapatistas (who are of course Mexican), but in which there was no single sign of or reference to *lo internacional!*

So the period of a globalized, neo-liberalized, informatized capitalism creates new problems and new challenges. It certainly questions any such simple appeal as that of the *Communist Manifesto*, assuming that workers are the *privileged* internationalist subjects; or any assumption that the ITUC, its associated unions and members provide the parameters for, or essence of, labour internationalism.

The challenges are beginning to be met, I would argue, by internationalist labour solidarity initiatives at the base, on the periphery and outside the TUWKI. (More under Point 4 below). But we should here note that they customarily take network form, are more active in cyberspace than in offices or conferences, that they are open to dialogue (both internally and externally), that they are often informed by the emancipatory principles and practices of the newest wave of global solidarity and justice movements.

Finally, and obviously, they do not accept the Iron Cage of Capitalism and Bureaucracy as the parameters of their thought and action. Consider the slogans I quoted above. Weber's Iron Cage was, after all, *his* conceptual one. Traditional national, industrial, colonial, militarist capitalism was actually a mass/mess of contradictions, of which the early labour movement was to various extents conscious of and exploited. The newest global solidarity movements are commonly aware both of the traditional contradictions and of the new ones. As well as of the new terrains of struggle, such as the cyberspatial. And they are customarily aware that the emancipatory struggle is both worldwide (privileging no world area) and 'intersectional'²⁰ – meaning interpenetrated by and

²⁰ See Wikipedia on [intersectionality](#).

interdependent on other alienated beings (including, in Latin American indigenous thinking, the earth itself).

3. What has been the experience of networking on work/labour issues in the World Social Forum – has it led to any concrete international action?

The dominant Brazilian union centre, the Central Única dos Trabalhadores (CUTB) played a major role and was a major presence in the early editions of the WSF, most of which took place in Brazil. It later fell out publicly with the WSF and not for any left (as distinct from institutional) reasons I am aware of. The ITUC has had an increasing presence, and sometimes a giant ‘World of Labour’ tent, has provided its family with a focal point. But this was also, of course, a *platform*, and I am aware of no significant effort by the ITUC, or the allied Global Unions, to dialogue with ‘other’ labour movements present (of rural labour, of women). There may have been others but the only ‘cross-movement dialogue’ I recall was sponsored by feminists, not by labour.

An alternative labour initiative, with the impressively (or was it deliberately?) low-profile name ‘Labour and Globalization’, was sponsored by a pro-WSF Italian union officer and a leading left socialist. It certainly attracted some of ‘labour’s others’, but it acted always as ‘His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition’, in the sense of accepting the parameters of the traditional unions, and issuing no alternative programme, charter, or even a discussion document. This effort ran out of steam around 2011, reportedly due to lack or loss of Italian union interest.

But we should not consider the unions or other labour people solely responsible here. The WSF, whilst hosting numerous significant social movements, and representing a significant challenge to the global hegemony, has, I think, been heavily marked by 1) the epoch and discourse of ‘global civil society’, 2) been subject to *ongización* (ngo-ization, for which see Alvarez 1999),²¹ and 3) been inevitably coloured by the 70-80 percent of participants with a university background. For many of these (as well as the new social movements of the later-20th century) ‘work’ was not, as such, an issue (although *jobs* increasingly are!), and the labour movement has been considered more a part of the problem than of the solution.

We can’t write off the WSF, any more than the traditional trade unions – or for that matter national parliaments. But I am convinced that a global movement for the emancipation of labour will have to start elsewhere. A 2014 Cambridge conference on labour protest worldwide²² reinforced my feeling that if ‘power’ comes from the top and the centre, ‘empowerment’ comes from the base and the periphery: the base of the unions, the periphery of the class, and at least the

²¹ See here also Wikipedia on [NGOization](#).

²² “‘Bread, Freedom and Social Justice’: Organised Workers and Mass Mobilizations in the Arab World, Europe and Latin America”, <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/events/25028>.

semi-periphery of capitalism (Southern Europe, East Asia, Brazil, South Africa). The appropriate slogan here might have to be ‘In the unions, with the unions, without the unions and – where necessary – against the unions’.

4. How effective are alternative cross-border/transnational worker initiatives in countering the power of global capital?

There was a 1980s wave, in which I was involved and wrote about, known as the ‘New Labour Internationalism’ (NLI) or ‘Shopfloor Internationalism’, itself a result of the labour and social movement radicalism of the 1970s. This was largely based on inter/national and local labour resource centres (LRCs), mostly acting as support groups, providing information and research services, many experimenting with what I called ‘international labour communication by computer’ (ILCC). Operating at the lowest levels of unionism, creating international linkages between workers on the shopfloor, this was rather independent and highly innovative. With the rise and rise of neo-liberal globalization, however, the NLI was trapped by its orientation to the workplace and the union form. It failed to recognize that any new labour internationalism had to go beyond the ‘factory gates and the union office’ (Haworth and Ramsay 1984). Some of its leading activists entered the unions they had previously criticised, others faded away, yet others continued their efforts to create autonomous LRCs for a new kind of labour internationalism.

The devastating impact of an informatized, neo-liberalized capitalist globalization has, however, given rise to a new wave of both action and reflection. International women worker campaigning may have best survived the neo-liberal tsunami (because of the women activists and feminist ideas). There is a significant new rural labour international, Via Campesina (Braga Vieira 2010, Bringel and Braga Vieira 2014), which organizes labourers as well as small farmers, and which could be considered a ‘networked organization’. There is a well-established network of mostly-female street traders, Streetnet. This links not the relevant NGOs in general but ‘membership-based organizations’ in particular. It adapted its constitution from that of an international trade union. Streetnet is autonomous of inter/national unions whilst often collaborating with such. Note that both Via Campesina (VC) and Streetnet were initiatives of the South or are actually initiated and/or inspired thereby.²³

²³ Being autonomous from the traditional inter/national unions, and being a membership-based organization, is no necessary guarantee of an autonomous discourse or strategy. Reading the following from WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), co-signed by StreetNet and numerous related bodies, I am reminded of the words of feminist [Audre Lourde](#), that ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’:

A majority of workers worldwide work in the informal economy, and most new jobs are informal jobs. It is assumed that informal work is unlikely to completely disappear, and that many informal economic activities will remain informal or semi-formal in the foreseeable future. There is no single, easy, one-step way to formalize informal employment. Rather, it should be understood as a gradual, ongoing process of

Numerous new labour solidarity initiatives have responded to the dispersion, restructuring and differentiation of working classes or categories, addressing themselves to particular regional or national formations (such as the China solidarity centres in Hong Kong), to the precarized, to the informatized, the petty-production sector, fisherpeople, sex workers, and migrants. One might think of migrant workers as the very embodiment of a globalized labour force and therefore as privileged bearers of a new labour internationalism. But whilst there are numerous networks of such, based on country of origin or country of work, and whilst there are various international NGO or church bodies addressing such workers, they seem to have remained resistant to the global models offered by VC or Streetnet. One simply cannot read off consciousness, organization and action from political-economic or socio-geographic position.

Then there are initiatives on the fringe of the formal inter/national union structures but largely oriented toward such. The union inter/nationals have so far proven generally incapable of doing more than using - *instrumentalising* - the Internet (faster! cheaper! wider-reaching!), as a one-way, one-to-many broadcaster. They have not understood informatization as implying a revolution in work, kinds of workers, the self-empowerment thereof, and for moving toward a constructive, horizontal dialogue and dialectic of equals. This role has been taken on by projects such as the humungous information/solidarity project, LabourStart/UnionBook, by Union Solidarity International (USI)²⁴ and the Global Labour Institute (GLI). These also happen to be heavily, if not solely, UK based. So is one 'industry specific one', Teacher Solidarity.²⁵

But the *China Labour Bulletin*, Hong Kong, is one of several such sophisticated operations there. Then in Australia we can find a Southern Initiative on Globalization and Trade Union Rights (SIGTUR) in Perth, and an Australia-Asia Worker Links (AAWL) in Victoria. And one should not forget the open and internationalist socialist sites such as 'Links International Journal of Socialist

incrementally incorporating informal workers and economic units into the formal economy through strengthening them and extending their rights, protection and benefits. (WIEGO 2014)

The whole ambitious and detailed document surely invites de- and re-construction. To start with, those in the informal economy are not a 'majority' - 50% plus? - but more like 85% - surely 'an overwhelming majority'? To continue, this is not 'the informal economy' (ILO social-liberal discourse): it is the 'petty-capitalist', 'petty-entrepreneurial' or 'real economy' (according to various political-economic discourses). Finally, the declaration represents, surely, a backward-looking utopianism: during an on-going global capitalist economic crisis, and a war on labour in the capitalist 'formal economy', the aim of WIEGO and friends is that of getting (back) into it. And this with the assistance of the ILO, denounced by Guy Standing (2008) in terms already quoted.

²⁴ [See here](#). This page introduces us to an 'Organising Network', whilst, dramatically, reminding us that social networking is not neutral, that every technology bears an ideology, and arguing that it is introducing a new kind of international social networking site for unions. Bearing in mind my early concept of 'International Labour Communication by Computer', I am wondering whether we are now moving to a new stage - ILCC 2.0.

²⁵ [Teacher Solidarity](#).

Renewal' in Australia, 'Debate' in South Africa, 'The Bullet' in Canada, or '[Left-East](#)' (wherever, apart from Cyberia, it might be sited).²⁶ Other projects increasingly come even to my inevitably limited attention. One is 'Forum Worlds of Labour – China and Germany', which is intended to create 'personal encounter and debate' at the shopfloor level. This could be understood as a revival of the shopfloor internationalism of the 1980s, linking as it does both German and China/Hongkong publications and networks largely of that era.²⁷ In Austria there is a new body for the 'Active Unemployed', which is proposing an international network of such.²⁸ Then I note a left metalworkers' union site in Brazil that has an international solidarity page in English, no less!²⁹ And also expressing solidarity in the South-North direction.

Whilst many of the labour-specific sites above are heavily oriented toward and sometimes dependent on inter/national union support - moral or material - their position on the union periphery and their cyberspace awareness and activity means they can obviously do things that the traditionally earth-bound unions cannot. And they show, to varying degrees, an awareness of or sensitivity toward the increasingly networked nature of the latest global social movements. This was, I think, demonstrated by a couple of events that took advantage of the ITUC Congress in Berlin. One was of the Global Labour University which, despite its German social-democratic base and intimate links with the ILO, nonetheless addresses the 21st century world.³⁰

A step beyond a union-fixation was taken by a NetworkedLabour conference, Amsterdam, 2013. It brought together 20-30 autonomous left specialists/activists on the globalization/informatization of work, of products, of workers, and then on the possibilities of emancipatory networking amongst such. One year later, however, it was yet to publish a promised report. My feeling is that it lacked significant reference to the history of ILCC, and the presence of those with practical contemporary experience of such. It is nonetheless an initiative which bears following.³¹ It seems to me to be being challenged (in direct relevance to workers and the labour movement) by a New York event, DigitalLabour.³²

²⁶ LeftEast, <http://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/>. This is its e-dress. It seems not to have an earth-bound address.

²⁷ See [here](#), so far only in German.

²⁸ [aktive-arbeitslose](#).

²⁹ <http://www.sindmetalsjc.org.br/sindicato/internacional/idioma/english/>.

³⁰ Which is not to exaggerate its radicality, given its focus on labour policies rather than labour politics (in the sense of collective labour self-empowerment). See [here](#) its pre-event paper outlines, which at least permit those not present to make their own sense of sometimes conflicting orientations.

³¹ See here, however, the NetworkedLabour-related work of Senalp and Senalp (forthcoming) and Senalp (2014a, b). And note the hope to hold a following [Networked Labour Seminar](#), May 2015.

³² <http://digitallabor.org/>

As for the general impact of such efforts? I think we have to recognize this remains modest. It also remains to be critically researched. For example the site of the CLB in Hongkong declares,

In addition to promoting workers' initiatives and our own project work in China, CLB informs workers in China of important developments in the international trade movement. We select stories of worker solidarity and courage that will inspire China's workers *and show them what real trade unions do*. Our English-language website conversely gives international readers a comprehensive *introduction to and analysis of the workers' movement in China*. [My emphasis.]

This seems to reproduce the asymmetrical and Westcentric union internationalism previously criticised. Here the paradise to be gained is one the West is losing! Fortunately, other Hong Kong-based sites go beyond this. I have here in mind, for example, the long-established Asia Monitor Resource Centre³³ but there are others.

Taking the longest-established and largest-scale *cyberspace* operation, LabourStart, this provides a remarkable multilingual source of news, and a space in which surfers can declare solidarity with numerous – with *endless* – online campaigns. Here the dangers arise of ritualization and information overload. Of course, those who use LabourStart can themselves select the countries or respond to issues that most concern them. But insofar as solidarity (overwhelmingly West-Rest) requires of surfers only a click, it raises the danger of 'clicktivism'. And then the LabourStart-linked UnionBook, whilst a many-to-many site (with the rather restrained presence of LabourStart's founder-owner, and whilst one I have long used as my own blogsite), comes over so far as a notice-board - or as a sandbox where we surfers can play, with minimal dialogue and with no visible cumulative effect or learning process.³⁴ LabourStart ran one of its in-place conferences immediately following the ITUC Congress in Berlin. Whilst an evaluation of the event (co-authored by LabourStart's initiator/owner) was predictably uncritical³⁵ another report was rather more informative.³⁶

The GLI is an interesting case in so far as it is union supported, has demonstrated some autonomy from the TUWKI complex, runs an annual international school, has a slowly increasing number of affiliates (including

³³ <http://www.amrc.org.hk/>

³⁴ This statement has to be qualified following Israel's third war on Gaza, July-August 2014, when UBook creator, Eric Lee, suspended me without warning for an 'offensive' and 'libelous' posting, then destroyed the evidence thereof and, finally, (after I had circulated widely an-online protest) *de*-suspended me! Clearly this raises more issues than those between two Jews, one who would consider himself Zionist Internationalist, the other a Radical-Democratic one. See further the reaction from UBook user, [Orsan Senalp](#) and a wrap-up on UBook by [myself](#).

³⁵ <http://labournewsnetwork.wordpress.com/2014/05/28/global-solidarity-on-display-in-berlin-as-trade-unionists-meet-at-labourstart-conference/>

³⁶ <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2014/05/30/labourstart-successful-conference-berlin>.

Russia, but not yet the Global South). At one of its annual summer schools, 2013, GLI founder, Dan Gallin, produced a blistering critique of international unionism, all the more telling in that it came from the former General Secretary of one of the Global Union Federations. He also proposed a re-politicising of the international union movement.³⁷

The GLI has also published, with or for the International Transportworkers Federation (ITF), a path-breaking multilingual handbook on *Organizing Precarious Transport Workers*.³⁸ Striking about this attractive brochure is: its awareness of the multiple forms of precarity; that precarity is a *universal* worker problem; that different kinds of precarious workers have different needs and demands; that they may (or may not) have effective non-union forms of self-organization; and, finally, that we cannot assume unions confronted by precarization are 'fit for purpose'. It urges a positive but critical attitude to NGOs working with the precarious. And it warns against the dangers of external (foreign 'development cooperation'?) funding.

A more unusual case would be the International Domestic Workers Network (IDWN), which managed to finally get an ILO Convention (No.189) on 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers' in 2011. The campaign for this brought together unions of and NGOs for domestic workers from various world regions, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF), various national union centres, a Manchester-based research-action centre (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, or WIEGO), and others. Also of interest is that this campaign made use of the 'Decent Work' slogan of the ILO-ITUC – a campaign of which I have been critical, not only because of its origin in an interstate organization rather than the labour movement, but because of its reiteration of traditional liberal capitalist notions about, well, what work and decency are (it would allow production of junk food, nuclear weapons and ecologically-destructive extractive industries, as long as working conditions and union rights were 'decent').³⁹

These can only be static shots of how a new kind of labour internationalism is developing, and they are obviously snapshots only from my camera – or 'subject position' as feminists might say. If I have seen and am here recognizing these projects, then there must be dozens of other such occurring in other places, other spaces, in other languages, in other alphabets.

³⁷ One version of this can be found [here](#).

³⁸ <http://global-labour.net/2014/01/itf-launches-new-guide-organising-precarious-transport-workers/>

³⁹ For a movement and a theoretical critique or and alternative to 'Decent Work', see Dinerstein 2014.

5. You have argued for moving beyond trade union internationalism, which remains trapped in the 'iron cage', and see new forms of labour self-articulation going beyond 'the capitalist canon', leading to the emergence of a new labour movement internationalism.

I hope I have given some answers to this question above. So I will here concentrate on the literature that goes beyond the Cage and the Canon.⁴⁰ Some of this literature is reviewed in pieces I have written on the 'new global labour studies'. There was a certain shrinkage of international labour studies in the 1990s, possibly when many leftists lost faith in the proletariat as a socialist vanguard and the incrementalist left in it as a modernizing one! Recently there has been an equally considerable revival of such studies. And not only by these 20th century tendencies. I have indeed been taking issue with such new 'global labour studies' as I consider to be trapped, like the inter/national trade unions, within the Cage. I don't want to repeat the arguments in two recent review articles (Waterman 2012, 2013a).⁴¹ Nor do I want to be too picky about what is or is not emancipatory (in the sense of seeking the surpassing of the alienation of labour by and for capital/state/empire/patriarchy/war). But we do seem to be witnessing a new wave of critical and creative monographs, conferences and compilations that are undermining (or firing at?) the Canon.⁴²

Here I would like to note a substantial new textbook entitled, simply enough, *Globalization and Work* (Williams et. al. 2013). Here are some of its chapter titles: Consumption, Work and Identity; Multinationals; International Labour Standards; Globalization, Labour and Social Movements; Management in Global Factories; Migrant Labour; Transnational Mobility; Gender and Intersectional Inequalities; Labour Conflict. In so far as this work ends up suggesting a Australinavian utopia (pp. 247-8), I consider that it here returns

⁴⁰ It is late, but hopefully not too late. to here introduce the 'Capitalist Canon' and the alternatives to such. Although earlier proposed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, here is an accessible discussion of such (Serrano and Xhafa 2011).

⁴¹ The second of these (Waterman 2013a) provides a base from which much of the argument of this paper is drawn.

⁴² Which is not to say that these compilations universally surpass the capitalist – or for that matter vulgar Marxist – canon. They each require or even invite critical review. In particular, I think, they need to be tested on their ICT-Awareness – the extent to which they recognize this latest capitalist technological revolution, creating new kinds of work, of workers, of forms of labour self-articulation and of 'disputed terrain'. See Chhachhi 2014, the already-mentioned Ness (2014), Clua-Losada and Horn (2014), WorkingUSA (2014) and Gall, Wilkinson and Hurd (2011), Panitch and Albo (2015). As for 2014 conferences, consider these:

[Forms of Labour in Europe and China, the Case of Foxconn,](#)

[Organised Workers and Mass Mobilizations in the Arab World, Europe and Latin America,](#)

[Social Movements In Global Perspectives: Past - Present – Future](#)

as well as the site of [RC44](#), the labour movements group within the International Sociological Association. Critical accounts of all of these would be welcome.

itself to the Golden Age of the Iron Cage. So I guess it is more the book's varied subject matters – and its extensive discussion of the relevant literature – that it seems to me a provocation to debate, discussion and dialogue on labour (and the newest global social movements!) in the New World Capitalist Disorder.⁴³

A dramatic piece coming out of the prolonged wave of social protest in Greece calls for 'the regeneration of a social-labour movement from the base for emancipation'.⁴⁴ This seems to echo a project I launched that has otherwise had little impact. That was – maybe still is? - the Global Labour Charter Project I initially launched around 2005. It was, on the one hand, provoked by the social-liberal 'Decent Work' campaign of the ILO-ITUC and, on the other hand, encouraged by emancipatory declarations coming out of the newest global social movement and thinking.⁴⁵ And, as I was completing this piece, I received this Italian call for a Europe-wide 'social strike' to take place November 14, 2014.⁴⁶ It is an attempt to combine all social discontents and struggles – including those concerning education and gender:

It is clear to all...that Europe is the minimum space of confrontation, the transnational level is decisive for conflicts that want to be incisive. And it is clear that without the creation of a space of permanent relationship and innovation between struggles and movements, breaking the impasse and subverting the present is unimaginable. A social strike, a strike that should be general and generalized, precarious and metropolitan, wants to be a first step, undoubtedly partial but fundamental, of this experiment. A way to begin to reverse this toxic narrative that replaces merit with equality, fierce competition with common happiness.

⁴³ Another global labour study came to my attention as I was completing this piece. This is Atzeni (2014). It is a compilation of some brilliant papers, many original and thought-provoking. But it is, indeed, concentrated on 'contemporary themes and theoretical issues'. So it does not take us much further in the direction of strategy. Nor does it address the question of internationalism. It is accessible [here](#). The WorkingUSA (2014) compilation, introduced by Kim Scipes, although primarily focused on the North-South axis and the North-South direction, includes a number of novel and sometimes fascinating case studies. [For yet another journal special issue on 'Globalization and International Labor Solidarity'](#) (Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies 2014) see [here](#). And yet another relevant contribution, the piece by North American labour movement and socialist veteran, Sam Gindin (2014), with its list of things to know about organising against capitalism in the USA. Whilst his critique of traditional unionist thinking and most of his alternative understandings are well taken, however, his prioritization of national over - or at least before - international solidarity means a blind eye to the manner in which these are inevitably interdependent, more than ever in a world he recognizes as globalized, neo-liberalised and financialised. Perhaps if he recognized informatization as contemporary capitalism's fourth leg, he would also see that the beast has many bellies and that this requires any emancipatory labour strategy to be simultaneously international and national – not to speak of local and regional.

⁴⁴ See [here](#).

⁴⁵ See [here](#).

⁴⁶ See [here](#).

I commented on this to the effect that whilst I thought a couple of months too short for this to be widely effective, it carried dramatically further the idea of 'social movement unionism' I launched in the later 1980s.

6. What does the 2014 Israel-Gaza war reveal about labour internationalism within or beyond your 'iron cage' and 'capitalist canon'?

This is an on-going and extremely fraught issue, so what I have to say are only some first thoughts. I do, however, think that it is the kind of issue for international labour solidarity that has been historically represented by World Wars One and Two, the Russian Revolution, the Spanish Civil War, Anti-Colonialism, Vietnam, the Cold War (NATO and West/East nuclear 'exterminism'), Czechoslovakia 1968, Chile 1973, Poland's Solidarnosc and Apartheid South Africa in the 1980s. Note that many of these went beyond the limits of any 'trade unions as such' discourse. Now, I have identified with Palestine solidarity and/or the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions campaign, particularly in so far as this has involved unions and the wider labour movement. More so since the 2014 Israeli outrage in Gaza that scandalized even liberal Zionists abroad and former IDF intelligence unit soldiers in Israel.⁴⁷ Given the Balkanisation/Ghettoization of Palestine, I have come to consider any UN-type 'two-state' solution as dead in the water (or should one here say 'desert' – including those caused by long-standing and continuing Israeli destruction of Palestine's ecology?). If we are not to continue towards Israel's 'Final Solution of the Arab Problem', then I see a one-state solution as the only democratic one. It may be distant (so is a post-capitalist world!) yet it provides a horizon toward which we must move.

At the same time I have been having difficulty in seeing the different reactions to the Israel/Palestine issue in the international labour movement in other than 20th Century terms. Whilst not identical, the issue itself has clear echoes of that against apartheid South Africa (not to speak of earlier cases of imperial racism, humiliation, militarism, expansionism, repression and massacre). There are even clearer echoes of the South African case in the international labour movement. The Eurocentric trade union internationals of that era (and various of their equally Eurocentric affiliates) were complicit with the white racist unions of South Africa, until they were forced by the rising Anti-Apartheid Movement, national and international, to boycott the latter and recognize the Black South African trade unions (Webster 1984, Southall 1995). And the Palestinian, civil society- and union-endorsed, BDS movement is at least

⁴⁷ This, as well as other reactions can be found amongst multiple postings on Union Book blog [here](#).

implicitly inspired by the successful South African campaign.⁴⁸ I identify various union responses to the latest invasion of Gaza, briefly:

The Labour Zionist. Though not confined to one person, this position is exemplified by the earlier-mentioned Eric Lee (Footnote 29), whose position reminds me of that of Western Communists as Stalinist Russia stagnated and declined. He has been busy with triumphalist celebration of Israel's wars, as well as the successes of the Zionist Histadrut within the TUWKIs in general and the ITUC in particular. He has, however, increasingly shifted, if uncertainly, to sobering reflections on the success of the BDS/Palestine-solidarity movement, though this is not to the point of recognizing any Israeli responsibility. Two pro-Israeli sites he has either created or been connected with, TULIP (Trade Unions Linking Israel and Palestine) and TUFU (Trade Union Friends of Israel) appear to have run out of steam late 2013. Eric (with whom I fruitfully dialogued on ILCC in the 1990s) has also increasingly withdrawn his pro-Israeli/Histadrut news, views and personal attachments from LabourStart and UnionBook, concentrating them on his own blogsite (from which he has also removed his LabourStart/UnionBook affiliations). Unlike many Western Communists (myself amongst them after the Soviet invasion of Communist Czechoslovakia) he has not yet had his '1968 Moment' - that of abandoning a fundamentalist state-nationalism and an inevitably 'particularistic internationalism', in favour of the dialogical/dialectical internationalism that his remarkable and pioneering online creations make possible.⁴⁹

The ITUC/ETC. By this formulation I mean the ITUC itself, the Global Unions (GUs) intimately associated with it, the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD, the European Trade Union Confederation and similar bodies for other regions,⁵⁰ and such national trade union affiliates as identify themselves uncritically with the ITUC, as well as such NGOs as might have been sponsored by, or that consider themselves allies of, the ITUC. The ITUC declared that it was 'horrified by the appalling death toll of civilians in Gaza', and called for ceasefire, a return to the 1967 borders, negotiations and a two-state solution. This identifies it closely with the UN position, to which the ITUC refers and defers. It, somewhat pathetically, organized an international campaign for union peace postcards to be sent to the UN! The International

⁴⁸ There is an important point of distinction between the labour campaign for BDS in South Africa and Palestine. This is precisely the existence of a mass Black working class and autonomous democratic trade unions in the former, the limited size of an Arab working class in Israel, and the party-political domination of the undemocratic [Palestinian unions](#). This implies a greater challenge to the international labour BDS campaign, particularly the need to surpass a narrow labourism. (More on this below).

⁴⁹ Though he continues, after first suspending my account and then restoring it - to tolerate my own anti-Zionist and pro-BDS postings on Union Book.

⁵⁰ An exception must be made for its regional organization for the Americas, CSA/TUCA, which came out with [a clear condemnation of Israel](#), particularly the 'brutal escalation' of its assault. As with previous such deviations from the Brussels line, however, this is unlikely to be reproduced - far less responded to - by the Kremlin/Vatican of TUWKIism. Indeed, I could only find it on the CSA site, in Spanish, not on the TUCA site, in English!

Transportworkers Federation, which condemned the Israeli bombings of Gaza has at least, however, created a humanitarian fund for Gaza. The ITUC has the Histadrut as a member and, at its 2012 Congress actually elected its leader, Ofer Eini, to a leading position within the organisation. Such Histadrut affiliations probably exist for all or most of the GUs.⁵¹ The ITUC/ETC thus appears to be in the position the old ICFTU occupied on South Africa before the South African and international Anti-Apartheid Movement forced it to abandon the racist unions and identify with the Black/anti-racist ones.

However, there are and may be growing differences within this camp. The Irish TUC, which is an ITUC affiliate, identified itself with the BDS movement already in 2007.⁵² And a 2014 congress of the British TUC, whilst not coming out explicitly for BDS, nonetheless took a stand distinctly more radical than that of the ITUC (whose position it nonetheless endorses). The TUC also identified itself with Amnesty and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the UK.⁵³ Some of the international labour support bodies, independent from but oriented toward what I have called TUKWI, came out for support to Palestine and/or BDS. At least one preserved 'radio silence' (actually internet silence), considering the matter a 'political' or 'inter-state' issue rather than a 'labour' or 'social' one. Such a position reproduces the hegemonic Western liberal discourse (the infamous Canon) that compartmentalizes the social terrain and does not recognize that an anti-political position is also a political position, at least if we take 'the political' to cover all exercises of power and expressions of powerlessness.

Unsurprisingly, this silence on Israel/Palestine is also reproduced by that US state-funded shill, the Solidarity Centre of the American AFL-CIO.⁵⁴

Palestine Solidarity and/or BDS campaigns. This campaign, launched from Palestine and endorsed by all Palestinian trade unions and the South African COSATU, is, as already suggested, either explicitly or implicitly inspired by the historical Anti-Apartheid Movement. As Israeli outrages have continued, this campaign has had increasing success. It has a considerable variety of expressions, from the passing of resolutions by national trade union centres and individual unions, to demonstrations and then actual labour boycott actions, such as those of South African dockers and those on the West Coast of the

⁵¹ This account is impressionistic, given that neither Wikipedia, the ITUC nor Histadrut websites yield the complete information necessary. Some was gleaned from a booklet on the [Global Labour Movement](#) (a misnomer given that it is limited to the ITUC, GUs and some ITUC friendly/acceptable NGOs), published 2013 by LabourStart. A systematic and critical research effort is necessary also here.

⁵² See [here](#)

⁵³ This all causing considerable misgivings to Labour Zionist, [Eric Lee](#).

⁵⁴ July 2014, it reported that Palestinian unions were '[under fire](#)', without reference to what kind of fire this was and where it was coming from, and giving this item no more importance than a half dozen other more routine collective bargaining matters. Oh, and a shill, in the US, is a person or body who/which publicly supports or publicizes someone or some body without revealing his identification with or dependence on the latter.

US/Canada.⁵⁵ I won't give this position more attention here because it finds explicit and detailed expression in its own media (see Footnote 45). However a question still needs to be raised about the failure or limitations, so far, of any campaign to get the ITUC/ETC to boycott Histadrut. I suspect that, with the exception of COSATU, those to the left of the ITUC confine any criticisms they might have of it to the corridors of powerlessness, and this for diplomatic reasons somewhat out of consonance with even Gorbachov's late-20th century notion/aspiration of *perestroika* and *glasnost* (restructuring and transparency).

Back to the Iron Cage. I said at the beginning of this section that the Palestine labour solidarity campaign seemed to me a typically 20th century one, meaning that it all falls within the solidarity repertoires of the epoch of a national-industrial-colonial capitalism. Consider the parallel between the Right/Left, Nationalist/Internationalist typology, presented above, and that I critiqued in Footnote 10. The problem is revealed if we look at the position of the (Neolithic) Communist World Federation of Trade Unions, which has declared total solidarity with the Palestinian unions, attacked Israel and world imperialism, and condemned the ITUC position on the conflict as 'a hideous joke'.⁵⁶ What WFTU here offers is in terms of Virtue v. Vice - a *Manichean Opposition*. Alternatively we could place this position on a *Spectrum*, leading from the Labour-Zionist one to that of 'Class and Mass', of 'Anti-Imperialism', and 'Revolution'. Indeed, various autonomous leftist solidarity bodies have been reproducing, uncritically, this knee-jerk WFTU reaction. In so far, however, as we now recognize 'revolution' as a problem rather than a solution (look at what happened to the Chinese one!), do we not also need to see solidarity with Palestinian workers and people in dialectical rather than mechanical (yes/no, good/bad, occupation/liberation) terms?

I have earlier proposed that we do need to see 'international solidarity' in more complex ways. I have also suggested we need to consider its axes, its directions, its external reach and local depth. I use the acronym ISCRAR: Identity, Substitution, Complementarity, Reciprocity, Affinity and Restitution.⁵⁷ None of these alone 'represents' solidarity; each of them alone can contradict both itself and a holistic notion of solidarity. Solidarity with Palestine falls largely within the category of a Substitution Solidarity – standing in for a suffering or needful community. But if this is understood as a sufficient understanding of solidarity, it may be, or can easily become a patron-client relation. And in so far as it is unidirectional, in this case from the West to the Rest, it can imply, like trade union 'development cooperation', the export or imposition of Our understanding and values on the Other. If, alternatively, a Substitution Solidarity is motivated by feelings of guilt or obligation, it can lead to 'self-subordination to the victim'. This was a syndrome common to the 'First-World/Third-World' solidarity movements of the last century.

⁵⁵ See [here](#).

⁵⁶ See [here](#)

⁵⁷ Waterman (1998, 2010), Vos (1976).

It seems to me that attempts to understand and surpass these limitations, in the case of solidarity with Palestine (if not of *labour* solidarity with Palestine) are beginning to be made. David Landy (2014/Forthcoming) has Hamas and other problematic/conflicting Palestinian forces in mind when he argues that a

notion of solidarity which seeks to avoid its necessary tensions, leads to a suppression of our political imaginations and activities, rather than to their expansion. This may be the greatest casualty of the doctrine of non-involvement [in the internal relations of the Palestinian movements] – that we may find that in undertaking such blinkered political work we are not engaged in action that is meaningful either for Palestinians, ourselves or our mutual world.

In a theoretical consideration of various identities and differences in relation to global [?] social transformation, which takes on both Marxism and feminism, Sriram Anath (this issue) says that

the BDS call provides an interesting platform to understand that it is in the lived politics of solidarity-based struggle that one is able to determine where greater attention to difference is needed, where commonality of interests lies, and how to engage with the contradictions arising from different forms of solidarity for a transformative political movement...[I]t would be interesting to see how the variegated coalitions/alliances and movements that have spawned from the BDS call engage with these numerous issues surrounding political solidarity.

Such reflections surely take us outside the Cage and beyond the Canon.

There are implications here for those concerned with a project of global social transformation, also in relation to labour and what I call the new global solidarity. This is clearly not the rose garden that we (were) promised in the last century. These roses have prickles. We need to work in this garden, together with our Others, armed less with industrial era steam shovels than with Gramsci's 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will'. Our major challenge in creating a new kind of labour internationalism is surely that of doing what Holloway, in my initial quote, says of holding together international struggles within the wage-labour relationship with those that seek to surpass it. And doing this without suppressing the necessity of moving from the first to the second.

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