THE TRANSFORMATION OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Following the Second World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) held from June 21 to 25, 2010 in Vancouver, this article examines the changes undergone by international trade unionism in recent years. The increasing power of multinational corporations, as a result of globalization, has led to a transformation in international trade unionism which has produced a reorganization of its structures and the emergence of new forms of action to ensure the protection of workers' rights worldwide. The key argument of this article is that the evolution of the structures and practices of international trade union organizations over the last two decades has been characterized by the implementation of strategies aimed, on the one hand, at reinforcing trade union unity and, on the other hand, at targeting multinational corporations. Lastly, although the transformation of international trade unionism has given rise to important structural changes, international trade union organizations continue to face formidable challenges in their efforts to effectively contribute to the regulation of the global economy.

Proletarians of the world, unite! exhorted Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their famous 1848 Manifesto of the Communist Party. However, rather than heeding this exhortation, the international trade union movement has historically been characterized by division, antagonism and internal conflict (Traub-Merz and Eckl 2007). The intensification of international trade over the last two decades, facilitated by major economic and financial institutions and technological advances, together with the rising power of multinational firms—some of which have become true global corporations organizing their establishments and value chains worldwide[1] (Gunter and Van der Hoeven 2004)—have highlighted the need to renew worker representation

internationally. In fact, globalization has had considerable impacts on government policies by limiting the capacity of national governments to implement policies regarding the economy, work and employment (Edwards and Elger 1999; Stiglitz 2002). Some analysts argue that by shifting their investments to countries offering inferior social protection plans and lower wages, multinational corporations have contributed to the deterioration of working conditions in industrialized countries and competition between workers in the developed and developing world (Gunter and Van Hoeven 2004; International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) 2004). In this context, trade union organizations must use supranational spaces more effectively in order to ensure the respect of fundamental social rights and the improvement of working conditions worldwide.

In an effort to respond to this challenge, international trade unionism[2] has, since the 1990s, undertaken an in-depth reorganization of its structures and a review of its action strategies. Major changes designed to reinforce trade union unity and the collective negotiation processes at the global level have affected the structures and activities of the main international trade union organizations. This article, examines the various aspects of this transformation. Part 1 will present a brief history of confederated international trade unionism, describing the development of the *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (ICFTU) which, over the last twenty years, acquired a dominant position over its two main rivals, the *World Federation of Trade Unions* (WFTU) and the *World Confederation of Labour* (WCL), before uniting with the latter to found the *International Trade Union Confederation* (ITUC) in 2006. We will also describe the role of this new ITUC in light of discussions which took place during its Second World Congress held in Vancouver from June 21–25, 2010. Part 2 will examine the evolution, during the same period, of *International Trade Secretariats* (ITSs) which, in 2002, became *Global Union Federations* (GUFs), aimed at better responding to the demands involved in defending the occupational interests of unionized workers vis-à-vis multinational corporations. We will then discuss in Part 3 the current state of international trade unionism and identify some of the main challenges that it faces as it struggles to play an important role in the regulation of the global economy.

FROM DIVISION TO UNIFICATION: THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATIONS

Apart from the short-lived unity of the first Socialist International organizations which were created in the 19th century, international trade unionism was for a long time divided along the lines of three ideological movements—communist, Christian, and reformist—each with its own accredited organization. The foundations of this division were laid with the establishment

in 1920 of an international confederation of Christian trade unions, later renamed the *World Confederation of Labour*[3] (WCL), and then with the creation in 1945 of the *World Federation of Trade Unions*[4] (WFTU), which, for a few years, brought together trade union movements of communist and social-democratic allegiance in the united battle against fascism. This division within international trade unionism, however, was at its height in 1949 during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, with the emergence of the *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (ICFTU), stemming from a split within the WFTU (Gordon 2000; Gumbrell-McCormick 2000). The fall of the Berlin Wall, followed shortly thereafter by the dismantling of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, increased the influence of the ICFTU on the international scene starting in the early 1990s. Moreover, during this period, the ICFTU expanded mainly at the expense of the WFTU, which lost most of its European affiliates and a large number of its members in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Gordon 2000). As regards its internal structures, the ICFTU included three main regional organizations, the Asia and Pacific Regional Organisation (APRO) for Asia and the Pacific regions, the African Regional Organization (ARO) for Africa, and the Inter-American Regional Organization of Workers (IAROW) for the Americas. It also maintained close ties with the International Trade Secretariats (ITSs), which bring national trade unions together at the international level by sector, industry or trade, and with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which encompasses the European affiliates of the ICFTU. In 2004, the ICFTU's membership numbered approximately 148 million workers belonging to more than 230 national trade union confederations in over 150 countries (ICFTU, 2004).

GLOBALISATION, ECONOMIC CRISIS AND THE CHANGING ROLES OF THE ICFTU

The ICFTU has always made its duty to work with intergovernmental organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN) on issues relating to the recognition of union rights and the respect of international labour standards. To this end, from the 1970s onwards, the ICFTU pressed intergovernmental organizations to develop rules of conduct for multinational corporations. The ICFTU was behind the first tripartite meeting in 1972 which led to the adoption by the ILO Governing Body in 1977 of the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy.[5] Similarly, through the intermediary of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD, which is *de facto* under its control, the ICFTU contributed to the development in 1976 of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises which proposed measures to member-states aimed at promoting the implementation of social policies within multinational

corporations. More specifically, these Guidelines addressed issues related to employment and labour relations juxtaposing these with other economic and financial issues. The ICFTU also supported the creation in 1974 by the UN of a permanent commission on multinational corporations which was responsible for proposing measures aimed at improving the economic and social impacts of the activities of these corporations on a global level, and participated actively in the discussions within this international body (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000).

During the 1980s, a decade marked by a major economic crisis in the industrialized countries, the ICFTU focused on issues related to inequalities in global economic development. The main ICFTU campaigns during this period related to the debt burden and the increasing impoverishment of countries in the global South, rising interest rates, the harmful effects of trade and financial liberalization, and the policies of international financial institutions with regard to developing countries (Kyloh 1998). The ICFTU's interventions with international financial institutions intensified during this decade, in which the ICFTU obtained a permanent observer status at the annual meetings of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In the early 1990s, the ICFTU's action extended to cover structural adjustment policies in Eastern Europe, within the framework of national forums organized at its initiative, bringing together representatives from the WB, the IMF, and the governments concerned by these policies. However, these interventions yielded fewer results than those conducted during the previous decade with the ILO, the UN and the OECD because the proposals presented by the ICFTU had little impact on the neo-liberal policies put forward by the IMF and the WB with regard to the economic restructuring of the countries concerned. Nevertheless, the ICFTU's interventions helped to make these international financial institutions aware of the need for a social regulation of globalization (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000; Kyloh 1998).

In the early 1990s, the ICFTU collaborated with the ITSs and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in an international campaign for the inclusion of a social clause in international trade agreements. This demand was included in the agenda of the World Trade Organization Conference held in Singapore in 1996 (Wilkinson and Hugues 1999). However, in the final declaration of the Conference, this demand was dismissed while the WTO's support of the ILO conventions was affirmed. The ICFTU's campaign continued during the WTO Ministerial Conference in Seattle in 1999, but differences of opinion appeared between trade union organizations in the North and South concerning the negative impacts of "social protectionism" on emerging economies.[6] The failure of the campaign for the social clause led the ICFTU to refocus its action on the ILO, whose tripartite governance structure gives a significant role to international trade union organizations. The ICFTU and the ITSs contributed in particular to the adoption in 1998 by the International Labour

Conference of the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its follow up. This Declaration, which is based on the ILO's eight core conventions on fundamental human rights (conventions 29, 87, 98, 100, 105, 111, 138 and 182), is binding on member-states, even if they have not ratified all these conventions (Duplessis 2004).

A NEWCOMER: THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (ITUC)

The end of the Cold War, the lessening of the ideological divides between trade union organizations and, more recently, the challenges posed by economic globalization have all led to renewed calls to unify the confederation of trade union forces internationally. This unification project, launched in early 2004 under the strong leadership of the former General Secretary of the ICFTU, led to the dissolution of the two trade union confederations that were most representative at the international level—the WCL and the ICFTU—and to the creation, ratified during its Founding Congress held in Vienna on November 1, 2006, of the new International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Today, this international trade union confederation includes some 311 national trade union confederations representing more than 175 million salaried workers from 155 countries around the world (ITUC 2010b).[7]

As presented in official publications, the ITUC's primary mission is "the promotion and defence of workers' rights and interests, through international cooperation between trade unions, global campaigning and advocacy within the major global institutions." The Programme Document adopted at the ITUC founding Congress in Vienna sets out the Confederation's overall policy framework. Its main areas of activity include: trade union and human rights; economy, society and the workplace; equality and non-discrimination; and international solidarity. The ITUC adheres to the principles of trade union democracy and independence, as set out in its Constitution. It is governed by four-yearly world congresses, a General Council and an Executive Bureau.[8]

Although, officially, the ICFTU and the WCL formed a new international confederation to provide space for the democratic participation of workers and trade unions, world economic and social development, and the expression of trade union pluralism, many observers nevertheless viewed this process as a "merger" between the two organizations and even as an "annexation" of the WCL by the ICFTU (Collombat 2005). The ICFTU's influence within the new organization is predominant since it brought 91 percent of its members to the latter, versus approximately 7 percent from the WCL and 2 percent from union organizations previously not affiliated with either of the two confederations. The leadership elected at the ITUC Founding Congress also mostly came from the former ICFTU, including the General Secretary and the President, who continued to hold the same positions within the new organization, while two former WCL

leaders were appointed to the positions of Deputy General Secretary and Deputy President (Rehfeldt 2007). Thus, the ITUC is, overall, the heir the ICFTU, which provided it with a large majority of its leaders and members, thus suggesting a probable continuity in the policies and action strategies of this previous international trade union confederation in the coming years.

In fact, the dissolution of the ICFTU and the WCL and the creation of the ITUC did not imply a radical change in the goals that had been pursued by confederated international trade unionism over the previous thirty years. However, the ITUC was immediately faced with pressing international issues such as the world food crisis, the international financial collapse and the acceleration of climate change. This international situation thus contributed to a diversification and an enlargement of the ITUC's fields of action (ITUC 2010b). The ITUC maintained its activities involving political lobbying against major financial institutions by holding numerous meetings with heads of state and leaders of the governments of G8 and G20 countries. With the aim of constructing an "alternative vision of a global economy which responds to the basic notions of social justice" (ITUC 2010a:8), the ITUC urged these leaders to take into account the devastating effects of the financial crisis on workers and to set up more consistent regulatory and control frameworks worldwide. To support its demands, the ITUC also played a decisive role in the adoption by the ILO, in 2009, of the Global Jobs Pact[9] established to guide national and international policies aimed at stimulating economic recovery, creating jobs and providing greater social protection to workers (Maschino 2009).

Apart these lobbying activities, the ITUC has also defended and promoted trade union rights, a fundamental *raison d'être* of the international trade union movement. Solidarity campaigns in support of trade unions in a precarious situation in countries such as Burma, Colombia, Guatemala, Guinea, Iran and Zimbabwe have been central to the ITUC's activities (ITUC 2010b). The organization's seminal publication, the *Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights Violations*, serves as an international reference and attracts public and media attention to labour violations around the world. Indeed, the 2010 edition of this survey reported 101 killings of trade unionists and 35 death threats against trade unionists between January 1 and December 31, 2009. Moreover, the organization examined the protection of fundamental rights at work, in particular freedom of association and collective bargaining, covered by ILO conventions 87 and 98, and specific proposals were submitted to the Second ITUC World Congress held in Vancouver in June 2010.

Although these major courses of action are in line with those pursued in the past by the organizations which gave birth to the ITUC, a new ITUC practice has involved instigating international mobilizations around the ILO Decent Work Program.[10] The inauguration of the "World Day for Decent Work"[11] held on October 7, 2008 and 2009, gave union activists the opportunity to join a vast

international mobilization campaign focusing on the need to find alternatives to the excesses of globalization. While this event is largely symbolic, it nevertheless lays the groundwork for the trade union movement to participate in joint action worldwide and is contributing to the movement to unite trade union forces around the ILO Decent Work Agenda. At the Vancouver Congress, moreover, the ITUC reaffirmed the crucial role played by the ILO in the social regulation of globalization, in particular through initiatives such as the Global Job Pact and the 2008 ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization.

The main resolution adopted by the Vancouver Congress, which defines the ITUC's action program for the next four years, identifies seven priority intervention areas for Global Social Justice. The first four involve continuing actions undertaken since the 2006 Congress with regard to the promotion of decent work, the regulation of the economy and world finance, universal access to quality public services, education and health, and sustainable development with low carbon outputs to fight against climate change. The other three policy priorities identified in the resolution are: labour market justice and equity, establishing a new model of sustainable development in which developed and developing countries will be able to benefit fairly from the fruits of social and economic progress, and promoting a new form of global governance to intergovernmental organizations in view of integrating a social dimension into neo-liberal economic globalization (ITUC 2010a).

Among the most important points discussed in Vancouver, the Congress concluded that there is a lack of effective governance in the current world economic system. It called for fundamental reforms in the major economic and financial institutions (especially the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Financial Stability Board (FSB), the World Bank (WB) and the World Trade Organization (WTO)) so as to improve the transparency and effectiveness in their decision-making processes. The Congress also underscored that full respect for ILO core labour standards must be a fundamental pillar of the global trade regime and reaffirmed its support for the incorporation of a social clause into WTO statutes that would require all products traded between countries to be produced and distributed in compliance with international core labour standards as a crucial instrument for social justice in an open world trading system.

Furthermore, the Congress underscored the increasingly pressing issue of the regulation of multinational firms, specifically pointing out that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives cannot fulfil or substitute for the regulatory role of the state in respect of business or for collective bargaining between employers' and workers' organizations, but can play a complementary role within a satisfactory framework of regulation protecting, *inter alia*, the full exercise of trade union rights. The Congress thus put forward an action plan which involves closer cooperation between ITUC and the GUFs within the Council of Global Unions, as well as supporting the building of networks and trade union

organizations inside multinational firms, the negotiation of international and global framework agreements (IFAs) and any activities that strengthen trade union co-operation within supply chains and in situations where firms operate in more than one sector.

The ITUC has also launched a new top priority campaign through its action on climate change. As shown by the new program discussed at its Vancouver Congress, the fight against climate change has now become an integral part of its political agenda. The ITUC is determined to ensure sustainable development. This stance furthermore marks an important change in the trade union movement with regard to the environment. Once considered a minor concern, unimportant to trade union organizations, the climate change issue subsequently became an object "of the defensive skepticism that marked a reluctance even to endorse the 1997 Kyoto Protocol by unions" (ITUC 2010a:12). However, the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 marked a breakthrough in thinking with its identification of the three pillars—economic, social, and environmental—of sustainable development. This definition brought out another way of viewing the social policies supported by the ITUC and new environmental concerns. This perspective was, moreover, put forward in Copenhagen, where the ITUC, with the support of a large delegation of trade unionists, defended the idea "of a just transition to a low carbon economy which would integrate the decent work agenda and the rights and interests of working people"[12] (Ibid.).

FROM INTERNATIONAL TRADE SECRETARIATS (ITSs) TO GLOBAL UNION FEDERATIONS (GUFS)

International Trade Secretariats (ITSs) were created in the late nineteenth century to bring federations and national unions together at the international level by employment sector—for example, the public service—by trade, or, most often, by industry sector. Their creation was the result of numerous associations of skilled workers in Europe which concluded "reciprocal agreements to facilitate the mobility and occupational recognition of their members in cross-border countries" (Bourque 2005). From the outset, the ITSs devoted themselves to representing the economic interests of their members internationally "through the exchange of information on workers' wages, the fight against the hiring of strikebreakers in neighbouring countries in the case of labour disputes, and the organization of international support for striking workers in a country" (Bourque 2005:6). Throughout their long history, the ITSs fiercely defended their autonomy as international union organizations dedicated to defending the economic and social interests of workers grouped by industry and trade.

The ITSs were overwhelmingly opposed to the WFTU's plan to integrate them as affiliated federations and, in 1949, largely supported the split which gave

birth to the ICFTU. This decision on the part of the ITS leaders was mainly motivated by the desire to escape from the centralizing control project of the WFTU which allowed them little freedom and autonomy. The ITSs thus joined the ICFTU camp with which—as made official in the Milan Agreement signed in 1951—they maintained relations characterized by both a desire for mutual assistance and cooperation as well as true independence (Bendt 2003).

Table 1
Main Characteristics of Global Union Federations

Global Union Federations	Affiliated unions	Number of countries covered	Number of members (in millions)
ITGLWF International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation	217	110	10
UNI Global Union Federation for Skills and Services	900	104	20
BWI Building and Wood Workers' International	317	130	12
ICEM International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions	403	122	20
IUF International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations	348	127	12
PSI Public Services International	650	150	20
EI Education International	394	171	30
IFJ International Federation of Journalists	150	119	0,5
IMF International Metalworkers' Federation	200	100	25
ITF International Transport Workers' Federation	681	148	4,5

In 2002, the ITSs were renamed Global Union Federations (GUFs) and were united under a collective network called *Global Unions*. While there were approximately thirty ITSs in the 1960s, currently there are only approximately ten GUFs (see Table 1). This reduction in numbers is the result of various waves of mergers which affected the community of ITSs throughout their history[13] (Fairbrother and Hammer 2005; Windmuller 2000). These mergers, which began during the 1970s but have intensified in recent years, have been driven by the GUFs' desire to increase their resources and capacities for action in order to more adequately respond to the challenges posed by globalization and multinational

corporations, whose fields of business have been expanding and are now deployed in an increasing number of regional spaces and industrial sectors.

In an era in which the membership of most national trade unions has decreased, at times dramatically, the GUFs have, on the contrary, seen their memberships increase since the end of the 1960s. This rise in GUF membership can be explained by the fact that, during the 1970s, the GUFs were joined by unions representing white-collar workers and salaried employees in the public services in Western Europe and North America and, more recently, by the emergence of free and democratic unions in Eastern Europe which have enlarged the union recruitment base of the main GUFs.

Today, the GUFs' main activities involve disseminating information on the working conditions that prevail in some multinational corporations or industrial sectors, organizing international support for affiliated unions and providing assistance to certain categories of workers through specialized committees (i.e., youth, women, etc.) The most important developments initiated by the GUFs, however, have concerned worker representation structures within multinational corporations. While the institutionalization of such structures is not a new phenomenon in itself,[14] the current context appears to have rekindled the desire on the part of the trade union movement to establish, within Multi-National Corporations (MNCs), a transnational countervailing power (Bronfenbrenner 2007; Anner et al. 2006; Armbruster 2005; Lillie 2005). Thus, several GUFs have recently become involved in the development of new forms of international solidarity by setting up "global trade union alliances" which bring together trade unions from different countries representing workers from a single MNC. Their goal is mainly to open up a space for dialogue and negotiation at the international level with the management at these firms so as to ensure the respect of fundamental workers' rights wherever the firm's activities are carried out. One of the means employed to this end is the negotiation of IFAs which include the eight fundamental ILO conventions and other international labour standards. While these agreements do not replace collective bargaining processes at the national and local levels, they do set out a framework of rights related to trade union recognition and social negotiation at the supranational level (Bourque 2005; Fairbrother and Hammer 2005).

IFAs, in most cases, have three main characteristics: (1) they incorporate the standards included in the ILO's 1998 Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; (2) they cover worldwide all establishments and salaried employees under the direct control of the signatory MNCs, and to varying degrees, those of their business partners; and (3) they are not legally binding (Bourque 2008). According to the inventory established by Papadakis (2008), there were 62 IFAs in December 2007, 16 of which were negotiated by the IMF, 15 by the Union Network International (UNI), 12 by the International Federation of Builders and Wood Workers (IFBWW), and 12 by the International Federation of

Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), of which one was negotiated jointly with the IFBWW. These four GUFs are thus behind nearly 90 percent of IFAs in force today. The total number of salaried employees in the 62 MNCs which are signatory to IFAs is approximately 5.3 million, with more than 80 percent of these agreements having been signed after January 1, 2002 (Papadakis 2008). In recent years, the negotiation of IFAs has become an increasingly important activity for GUFs. Moreover, the dynamism of these trade union organizations is generally recognized and many observers consider them to be the most operational structures of international trade unionism (Croucher and Cotton 2009).

Although "associated" with the ITUC,[15] the GUFs remain solely responsible for establishing their own programs and policies. Moreover, in its new Constitution and Standing Orders, the ITUC recognizes "the autonomy and responsibility of the global union federations with regard to representation and trade union action in their respective sectors and in relevant multinational enterprises, and the importance of sectoral action to the trade union movement as a whole" (ITUC 2006:11).

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE RENEWAL OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNIONISM

Over the last two decades, international trade unionism has been evolving toward greater unity within the trade union movement worldwide. The creation of the ITUC in November 2006 marked an important turning point in the history of trade unionism, ending the international division that had persisted since the early twentieth century between social-democratic and secular unionism, as represented by the ICFTU, and Christian unionism, as embodied by the WCL. The mergers of the ITSs and their transformation into GUFs over the last two decades have also been in line with this trend toward unity.

Many observers have been quick to welcome these efforts to unite, emphasizing that at the confederations level, the international union movement can now intervene in a more unified manner with major economic and financial organizations (Rehfeldt 2007). At the sectoral level, the movement can pursue coordinated action to ensure better protection of workers against countries and multinational corporations that do not respect human and social rights (Bourque 2008). In contrast, other observers have been highly skeptical about the results of these organizational changes (Delarue 2008). Moreover, it should be recognized that the movement to unite trade union forces internationally has not in any way obliterated the importance of the issues and challenges currently faced by international trade union movement.

One of these challenges involves effectively taking into account the North-South divide that has replaced the old East-West divide which prevailed during

the Cold War and which was marked, at the international level, by an intense ideological and political struggle between the WFTU and the ICFTU. Despite international trade union leaders' rhetorical commitment to building new forms of solidarity worldwide, the intensification of social and structural inequalities in the global distribution of wealth have exacerbated tensions between workers in the global North and South. Reconciling these interests is one of the main challenges faced by the structures of international trade unionism which have historically been dominated by European trade union organizations (Collombat 2009). As regards their structure, it should be noted that the headquarters of the ITUC and of all the GUFs are based in Europe and that the great majority of staff in these organizations are also of European origin. The latest ITUC financial report eloquently attests to this "eurocentrism" of international trade unionism since of all trade union dues received by this organization in 2009, more than 61.5 percent came from its affiliates in Western Europe (ITUC 2010c).

Another major challenge faced by international trade unionism involves giving a concrete expression to the structural changes it has undergone. Faced with the numerous expectations raised in particular by the creation of the ITUC, some observers are concerned about the latter being transformed into an institutional machine, confined to denouncing neo-liberalism but unable to develop the concrete actions needed to regulate globalization (Delarue 2008). Putting the blame on the very limited budgets available to international trade union organizations,[16] these critics maintain that a real radical reform of the international trade union movement can only come about from the base and not, as is currently the case, as the result of a top-down process that is intrinsically bureaucratic and not directly connected with the social realities and trade union struggles taking place at the local level.[17]

Although it is fundamentally important for international trade union organizations to be able to stimulate actions that respond to the local concerns of workers, it is nevertheless necessary to refrain from saddling them with the duty, on their own, to create actions of international scale and to provide an effective countervailing power to globalization. These organizations are at the junction of complex social and political interactions in which they are only one of the strategic actors. Their role must thus be conceived in relation to other local, national and regional levels where trade union organizations have historically been rooted and, at times, endowed with substantial resources. In this sense, the mandate of international trade union organizations does not involve leading labour action internationally on their own but rather ensuring the representation of a "voice of labour" worldwide and fostering discussions and the implementation of coordinated action strategies between labour organizations at the different levels. The recent development of new tools such as "global trade union alliances" and International Framework Agreements moreover demonstrates, to a certain extent, the international trade union movement's

capacity for innovation (Hennebert 2010). To claim that the structural changes which have affected international trade union organizations are merely cosmetic is tantamount to disregarding the renewed dynamism of these organizations, in particular, pertaining to the regulation of multinational firms and the promotion of the ILO Decent Work Program.

NOTES

[1]   According to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD), in 2004 there were more than 61,000 multinational corporations worldwide, that is, nearly ten times more than in the late 1960s (UNCTD 2004). Moreover, acquisitions and mergers of corporations as well as the restructuring of global value chains by MNCs during the 1985-2002 period increased their share of international trade by nearly 70 percent (Gunter and Van de Hoeven 2004).

[2]   While the current landscape of international unionism is made up of numerous organizations, two main sets of organizations operating internationally can be identified. They are, on the one hand, the large international trade union confederations and their affiliated regional organizations and, on the other hand, Global Union Federations (GUFs), which conduct their international action at the sectoral level.

[3]   As an heir to the International Confederation of Christian Trade Unions (ICCTU) founded in 1920, the WCL included, until it was dissolved, 144 independent union organizations in 116 countries. Its head office was in Brussels, Belgium, and it boasted approximately 26 million members. The history of the ICCTU/WCL was eventful to say the least. Born in the cradle of Europe and of Christian allegiance, the ICCTU had to deal, soon after it was founded, with the rise of Fascism and Nazism in the old continent. After the war, the ICCTU, whose members had until then been confined to Europe, opted for a strategy of expansion to increase its level of representation internationally. However, the leaders of the confederation soon realized that a strictly "Christian" trade union movement had very little chance of achieving real expansion, in particular in Africa and Asia. This realization led to the creation in 1968 of the WCL, which was intended to replace the ICCTU and move beyond the borders of a narrow confessionalism. This change of name and the creation of a new statement of principle opened the door for expansion to the Third World and contributed to the development of a conception of development and society that was "anti-capitalist, anti-totalitarian and anti-communist."

[4]   Founded in Paris on October 3, 1945, the WFTU was, in the late 1970s, the largest international trade union federation, bringing together more than 190 million members, mainly from communist countries in Eastern Europe. Its support for anti-imperialist movements and its opposition to colonialism historically allowed it to obtain a considerable number of members from the Third World. Embracing a communist ideology and massively dominated by trade unions in socialist countries, this federation, however, underwent a dramatic decline during the break-up of Eastern Europe and is now a dying federation.

[5] The principles laid down in this universal instrument offer guidelines to MNCs, governments, and employers' and workers' organizations in such areas as employment, training, working and living conditions, and industrial relations.

[6] It should be pointed out that the North-South divide also extends, according to a particular logic, into the international spaces for collaboration and inter-union representation. Indeed, while the trade unions in the South may see establishing cooperative relations with trade unions in the North as an opportunity, they sometimes feel isolated within these international organizations since their limited resources do not allow them to be sufficiently involved in the decision-making spheres. The danger for the trade unions in the South thus becomes the instrumentalization of their participation, raising what Anner (2001) refers to as "the paradox of labour transnationalism."

[7] The process of creating this new world confederation was completed recently with the creation of the ITUC Regional Organizations for Asia-Pacific and Africa in 2007, the creation of the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC) also in 2007, and that of the Americas in 2008.

[8] The chief executive of the ITUC is General Secretary Sharan Burrow, supported by Deputy General Secretary Jaap Wienen. The ITUC regional organizations are the Asia-Pacific Regional Organization (ITUC-AP), the African Regional Organization (ITUC-AF) and the American Regional Organization (TUCA). The ITUC also cooperates closely with the European Trade Union Confederation, including through the Pan-European Regional Council, which was created in March 2007.

[9] The Global Jobs Pact proposes a range of crisis-response measures that countries can adapt to their specific needs and situations. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution, but rather a portfolio of options based on examples of success, also designed to inform and support action at the multilateral level. The Pact urges governments to consider options such as public infrastructure investment, special employment programs, the broadening of social protection and minimum wages.

[10] Decent Work, as defined by the ILO and endorsed by the international community, means opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. It includes various elements: opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

[11] As part of this theme day, events were organized in 130 countries by 216 affiliated organizations and 79 other organizations, namely trade unions which are not members of the ITUC.

[12] The ITUC recently took a more assertive stand with regard to the issue of climate change, calling it a priority issue for trade unions. The ITUC has thus undertaken to work "actively with its affiliates in positioning the labour movement in the climate agenda and on the need for a fair, ambitious and binding agreement in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)" (ITUC 2010a:14).

[13] The concentration movement, which began in 1970 with the grouping of three ITSs to form the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF), accelerated in the early 1990s with the merger of the federations of chemical and mine workers to form the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM). In 1999, the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical and Technical Employees (FIET), and the Global Union Federations in telecommunications, graphics and media also merged to form the UNI (Union Network International), the main international trade union organization of private services (Windmuller 2000).

[14] The first permanent and operational instruments developed by trade unions within multinational corporations were put in place during the 1960s-70s and usually took the form of World Works Councils (Da Costa and Rehfeldt 2008; Litvak and Maule 1972). In North America, these early initiatives aimed at creating transnational union-based dialogue resulted largely from the position of the AFL-CIO and the United Auto Workers (UAW) which, facing increased competition from European subsidiaries and fearing that some of their jobs would be off-shored, promoted the creation of plurinational trade union coordination structures within the Big Three auto companies (Da Costa and Rehfeldt 2008).

[15] The GUFs, of which one per sector is recognized by the ITUC, are represented, with the right to speak, within the latter's governing bodies. These organizations created the Council of Global Unions to coordinate their strategies and actions at the international level.

[16] As an example, the ITUC's budget, which has been relatively stable for many years, is some 11 million euros yearly, a very large part of which comes from the union dues of its affiliated trade unions (ITUC 2010c).

[17] Critics of this radical reform of the structures of international trade unionism could thus easily adopt the famous phrase from *Guépard* by the Italian writer Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, reminding us that sometimes "we need to change so we can remain the same."

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