

## Globalisation from Below

The bottom-up approach (not baring one's backside to the evangelicals who propagate neo-conservative market fundamentalism), but redeeming the essential globalising nature of human endeavour, and giving it a democratized flavour – is what the writer Ronaldo Munck posits, and what his reviewers enthusiastically endorse.

We are often seen as die-hard protestors against everything new, modern, and of global-public interest.

These reviews turn the debate on its head and argue convincingly, and cogently, that chauvinistic nationalism and protectionism (witness the current outsourcing debate in the US and Europe) have no place if we are to take the battle for equity, fraternity and liberty to its essential meaning and practice. The focus here is on labour and related issues.

This is no going back to the Old Style Labour International and Solidarity of the Organised and the Cream of Labour. This is a call to make possible another Globalisation that is inclusive of All Labour - Northern and Southern, Organised and Unorganised, Formal and Informal, Male and Female, Adult and Child, Rural and Urban.




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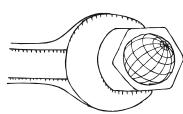
**Workers and Globalisation**, by C.T Kurian , Frontline Magazine,  Volume 20 - Issue 17, August 16 - 29, 2003.  
<http://www.flonnet.com/fl2017/stories/20030829000107200.htm>  
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**Globalisation and Labour: The New 'Great Transformation'** by  
 Ronaldo Munck, Madhyam Books (by arrangement with Zed Books),

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2003. [B.U00.M63]

## Workers and Globalisation

C. T. Kurien



**Globalisation and Labour:  
The New Great  
Transformation** by Ronaldo  
Munck; Madhyam Books,  
Delhi, 2003; pages xiii + 216,  
Rs.250. [B.U00.M63]

Global workers' movements ... must give up their past preoccupation with workers in the organised sectors and become adequately inclusive of workers of all categories. Incorporating workers of the informal sector will call for major changes in the organisational patterns and strategies of workers' movements.

Secondly, the concerns of workers' movements will also have to change. From treating workers as a homogeneous category, the intrinsic differences that arise from the human attributes of workers (culture, gender, etc.) must be recognised and respected.

### The Worker in Community

This is no easy task, though, for it is a paradigm shift from worker as worker, to worker in the household, worker at workplace and worker in community. It is a move away from an earlier singularity to an emerging complexity.

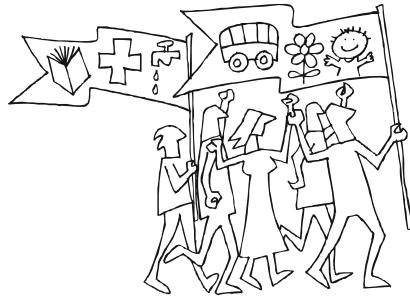
On many critical issues workers' movements will have to work closely with other agencies - feminists, environmentalists, human rights activists, consumer protection groups. Not that the right thing is to go along with any or all of such agencies uncritically. Many environmentalists are just conservationists; human rights are often championed by die-hard individualists who refuse to recognise the societal dimension of human beings. But environmental problems are

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global today and human rights must become global.

As those interacting with nature and other human beings in the process of production, workers are in a position to know what is genuine and what is not in these issues. They must, therefore, enter into the agenda of workers' movements.

The author posits a '**social movement trade unionism**' that will not only champion the cause of workers as workers but also incorporate common social issues such as health, education, transport and



environment.

There is a greater understanding that social identity is both complex and fluid. Workers are also citizens and consumers; they are also divided by gender and ethnicity, for example. Fluidity is also a natural condition and we should not expect consciousness to be fixed. This thumbnail sketch necessarily points towards a possible new mode of internationalism in keeping with the 'postmodern' globalised era in which we live.

### Beyond a Nationalistic Ethos

That new mode of internationalism will have to be consciously striven for because it is easy for workers' movements to slide back into the illusory security of a nationalistic ethos.

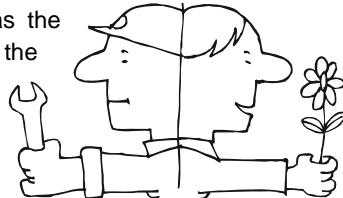
The workers of the North have become attached to the variety of social security measures offered by their governments. Workers of the South

have, in the past half century, become equally attached to the protective security that their governments provided through their nationalistic development programmes. A world without borders, advantageous to workers everywhere, can come only by abandoning the temporary securities of the past.

The workers of the North, for instance, must join hands with their comrades in the South in fighting for greater international mobility of workers. Workers in the South must accept the necessity of '***social clauses***' globally, including in their own countries.

The second of these statements in the abstract may appear to be threatening from the point of view of the South. It must be conceded that in international negotiations the representatives of the North can use the "social clauses" to protect their interest and this must be guarded against.

But, consider a concrete case such as the use of child labour. Should workers in the South oppose eradication of child labour on the ground that it is simply a pressure tactic from the North, or actively strive for it because the tender age of children should be protected everywhere, including in poor countries?



Decisions on matters like this are not going to be easy, but a welcome aspect of contemporary globalisation is that such issues will have to be faced everywhere in the world.

*In sum, the role of workers in the context of contemporary globalisation is not to declare to be totally against it. Rather, they must make use of the opportunity of the growing awareness of the need for and possibilities of a world without boundaries to bring about an alternative global social system of production based on the political economy of labour and the moral imperatives of*

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*universal human rights and welfare.  
That, indeed, will be a great transformation.*

Excerpts



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Ronaldo Munck; Madhyam Books  
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2003; pp xiii+216, Rs 250.  
[B.U00.M63]

Globalisation appears to be the new "**Great Transformation**" of our time. The Great Transformation, which Polanyi wrote about in 1957, was the Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth century, which saw 'an almost miraculous improvement of the tools of production, (but) which was accompanied by a catastrophic dislocation of the lives of common people'.

The current Globalisation Revolution is also characterised by a seemingly miraculous development of capitalism, but also by an equally profound dislocation of lives of ordinary people across the globe.

### Transformations

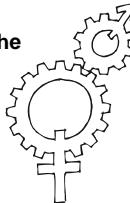
Globalisation, in the shape of its prime economic agent, the Great Corporation, cuts across political frontiers in a way that leads to **de-territorialisation** (the decline of the nation state). While corporations have headquarters in particular nation states, they are effectively disembedded from these societies by their economic logic.

Another widespread tendency is '**brazilianisation**', which is the spread of production patterns and social relations typical of the South to the advanced industrial societies of the North. Thus, a preponderance of

'**informal**' and precarious forms of work has become generalised.

For perhaps a decade, until Seattle 1999, it seemed that capitalist globalisation was indeed the '**only game in town**', hegemonic in all respects. But what if, as Marx predicted in his own era, this dynamic capitalism on a global scale was producing its own gravedigger?

Feminisation: the introduction of more women into the labour force. In the EU, for example, 20 million out of 29 million new workers joining the labour force between 1960 and 1990, were women with unregulated, insecure employment conditions.



The enlightened globalising elite is acutely aware of the problem of **adjusting the still nationally based political governance of world politics and society to a rapidly growing globalising economy** (group of lisbon 1995). They understand the need for global governance, which is in direct contradiction to fundamentalist free market ideologies. This brings to the fore the working of a '**double movement**' whereby society seeks to protect itself from the dislocations created by the market.

#### **"Globalisation from below"**

"Just as the corporate and political elites are reaching across national borders to further their agendas, people at the grassroots are connecting their struggles around the world to impose their need and interests on the global economy" (Jeremy Brecher, 2000).

Thus globalisation from below is seen as a counter movement beginning in diverse parts around different issues. It could be global warming, the debt crisis, genetically modified food, consumer movements or identity politics which brought people into action against globalisation or, at least, its effects.

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The **new** social movements are seen to represent a qualitatively different form of transformative politics and in embryo, a new societal paradigm. They stress their autonomy from party politics and prioritise civil society over the state.

### **The Cycle from One Great Transformation to the New**

Economy	Labour
Industrial Revolution	Internationalisation of labour (1st half of 19th century) Closer relationship with Nation States (2nd half of 19th century)
Post WWII: National Capitalism, Golden Era 60s, 70s : Profit rates in advanced capitalist countries fall by a third	Labour movement drifts into a nation-statist perspective
Neo-liberalism of 90s: De-territorialisation, Brazilianisation, Feminisation	Call for International Union action, as a countervailing power to MNCs. (Charles Levinson, former head of International Confederation of Chemical & General Worker's Union)

#### **Towards a New Movement**

"I believe labour and other social movements should be neither for nor against globalisation but, rather, see the issue as one of understanding the complexity of globalisation as a process of social transformation".

At a regional level, trade unions are increasingly beginning to develop a coherent joint strategy. National Union centres are also changing under the impact of globalisation. The limitations of nationalist, economicistic and corporatist strategies are plain to see. In Denmark, for example, the General Workers' Union called for a bold new global agenda which argues that: we must use our global strength to force TNCs to have

much more moral and ethical standards, to respect workers' rights, to have codes of conduct and to accept the establishment of international workers' councils. The Danish Union does not think purely in trade unionist ways and recognises, for example, that "**NGOs are an important voice in civil society. As trade unions we must be more open to enter into strategic alliances not only with our political allies but with NGOs, such as women's and youth organisations, social welfare, development and human rights, and environment and consumers' organisations who share our general objectives.**" (SID, 1997)

A new more internationalist, as well as objectively "globalised", labour movement is emerging with a strong social movement or community orientation.

Has the process of trade union renewal/reinvention created a new global labour movement capable of confronting the effects of globalisation? I would say that the international trade union movement is, at one and the same time, a new transnational social movement and a representative organisation that is more than the transnational advocacy groups, promoting gender, environment and human rights issues. By necessity, the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) has had to reconsider its Cold War past and, however unevenly or hesitantly, move towards a united and democratic approach to globalisation. In doing so it has to learn much from the *new social movements, and from the NGO way of working*.

However, Trade Unions, as always, advocate on behalf of their members, and, whatever the problems of 'representativity' they are more democratic than, say, Greenpeace. The international trade union movement certainly has the motivation to 'go global' (if it has to survive) and it has the technology (internet, cheaper travel) to do so. It will play a central and increasing role in achieving a degree of social regulation over the worldwide expansion of capitalism in the decades to come.

For Polanyi, workers, representing as they did a large section of society,

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were the “only available class for the protection of the interests of the consumers, of the citizens, of human beings as such...” Socialism is essentially the tendency inherent in an industrial civilisation to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society (Polanyi, 1957).