FREE TRADE & THE NEW LABOUR INTERNATIONALISM

INTRODUCTION: AGENCY & STRUCTURAL DETERMINISM

Following the revolutionary turn to free trade, investment and finance after 1978 these policy choices were imposed on society and are framed as an efficient, dynamic, growth orientated strategy, giving reign to the natural law of the self-regulating market (Harvey, 2005: 1-4). This deterministic mode of analysis meant that as these policies swept the globe in the decades that followed the process was represented as unstoppable and indeed, inevitable. So too were the impacts on society anticipated by Polanyi (2001 [1944]: 3-4), which are reflected in widening inequality, north and south, and the growth of a pervasive, psychologically destructive, culture of insecurity, which has accompanied marketization (Webster, et.al., 2008)[1]. Bieler and Lindberg (2011:3) observe that the Gini coefficient, an important measure of inequality, more than doubled between 1980 and 2005.[2] Harvey (2010a: 289-290) in his analysis of accumulation by dispossession observes the proportion of the national income and wealth held by the top one per cent of the population in the United States has doubled over the past twenty years, and trippled for the top 0.1 per cent. The ratio between CEOs and their median salaried workers, which stood at 30:1 in 1970, has soared to more than 350:1.

These adverse changes did not trigger a movement for economic justice and security. Buffeted by continuous restructuring, made to feel fearful and insecure, workers, in the main, retreated into the private sphere and accommodated fatalistically to the new market reality (Lambert, Gillan, 2007: 76-78). The labor studies literature interpreted this sea change. The new era of the free market meant adjusting to the mobility of global corporations, which has weakened labour's bargaining power unleashing a race to the bottom in wages and working conditions (Bronfrenbrenner 2007: 2; Hyman, 1995: 3). Furthermore, these policies are undermining social programs of sovereign states (Castells 1997: 243-246). The segmentation of workforces into permanent and casual status and the rise of global production networks (GPNs) complements capital mobility deepening an experience of powerlessness. A cardinal feature of GPNs is their grounding in an array of precarious work models – sweatshops, day labour and homework, often established through complex outsourcing arrangements where there the role and responsibility of the employer is obscured (Lambert, Herod, 2013; Standing, 2011). These changes have eroded unionism, which has traditionally organized only full time workers.

The emergent field of the new global labour studies, whilst acknowledging these processes of societal disempowerment imposed by free trade, nevertheless analyses the rise of a new labour internationalism (NLI) as a search for *new* power sources with potential to revitalize resistance to neoliberal restructuring (Taylor 2009; Waterman, 2009; Munck 2009).[3] The NLI is largely, though not exclusively, a phenomenon of the global south and is at the forefront of this search.[4] One feature of this approach to labour studies is an emphasis on agency. Bieler and Lindberg (2011: 221) capture a problematic this approach highlights, when they reflect 'Current analysis of globalization tends to outline consequences for workers and unions *rather than seeing them as actors* (my emphasis), able to influence structures and power relations'. The issue is *how* might unions exert such influence? An argument central to this paper, based on surveys and qualitative interviews between 1999 and 2011, contends the colonial and imperial experience of the global south and

subsequent struggles against authoritarian regimes has shaped a *particular political culture of human agency*, which is central to resistance prospects. However, the dynamic of subjectivity is not an autonomous process. Agency is grounded in structural change – capital accumulation on a global scale – which dispossesses whilst simultaneously creating a set of objective conditions which could generate resistance, provided such agency exists. The question, 'what are the cultural variants' lies at the heart of this problematic. The short history of the NLI in the global south highlights a fundamental dichotomy between leadership accommodation and resistance. The former operate within the confines of an apolitical trade union rights stratagem, whilst the latter are politicized and have proven ready to experiment with radical interventions. Such a politicized movement orientation exploits the points of vulnerability in neoliberalism; the other views this as adventurism. Vulnerability is seen to reside in the high degree of integration of the global economy through free trade. This integration is further reinforced through just-in-time production systems opening the way for the application of logistical power (Webster, et.al. 2008: 11). Exploiting such vulnerability may assume that the process of national unions going global is simply a logical extension of their current commitments. However, the transition to a global union response is beset by obstacles, the national institutional grounding being the most significant.

Olle and Schoeller (1984: 39) in their extended critique of Levinson's (1972) 'somewhat euphoric' model of labour internationalism conclude that the nationalisation of trade unionism has a material foundation which limits and enfeebles labour internationalism. The authors (1984:45) contend that 'with the introduction of the nation state as the context for capital accumulation the national average conditions of labour come into being which at the same time present a material basis for a national level reproduction of the working class. Parallel to this formulation of a national average worker, international comparison reveals a differentiated pattern of development. They extend the argument. As a result of different conditions of accumulation 'an international graduation in national levels of reproduction occurs, which 'places limits on international trade union policy of representing economic interests', creating 'national fractionalisation within the international trade union movement' (1984: 45). Thus the historical evolution of trade union internationalism is one where economic interests confined labour internationalism. Differences in national conditions of production and reproduction and competition between workers undermined labour internationalism. The authors conclude the alternatives are either continuing this economistic labour internationalism or politicizing this process thereby seeking to increase the power of the working class as a whole.

In the context of these issues of structure, agency, nationalism and the seemingly objective conflicts of interest propelled by the uneven geographic evaluation of labour, the paper analyses the rise of the *Southern Initiative on Globalization & Trade Union Rights* (SIGTUR) over the past two decades, which is an initiative of leading democratic unions in the global south since 1991. However, the paper is more than just an evaluation of SIGTUR. Rather, this formation is the prism through which the potential for a meaningful opposition to the free trade model is considered. The narrative of SIGTUR has this singular purpose: to provide a point of debate as to the *kind of movement* necessary to force a profound change in the free trade paradigm. Consequently, a concrete critique of an *actual* movement of resistance to free trade highlighting its potential and limitations and the evolving definition of its resistance role to neoliberal restructuring might at least foreground a set of bold political questions central to the current predicament characterized by a pervasive sense of

societal powerlessness. Certainly, the *Occupy Wall Street* phenomenon raises similar questions, requiring an equally rigorous critical evaluation. At least in the presence of movement there are sparks of hope breaking through a long phase of scant resistance to dramatic crises. These movements need to be grounded within the historical geography of capital accumulation, particularly the role of finance capital in this process of dispossession and the spatial fixes shaped by the unequal evaluation of labour.[5] Given the forces aligned against any serious challenge to the free market, an effective global counter movement, envisaged as a movement of movements, is the only force with potential to impose an alternative. NLI is but one movement in such a yet to be realized constellation. To engage these questions, the argument unfolds in four sections: first, the origins of SIGTUR as one reflection of NLI; second, the formation's agency and culture; third, the search for new sources of power and finally, a conclusion which evaluates the SIGTUR project.

CONTRADICTORY ORIGINS

The concept of a south/south movement of democratic trade unions was formulated in the late 1980s and the decision to establish such a movement was taken at an inaugural meeting held in Perth Western Australia in May 1991. This event comprised representatives of the *Congress of South African Trade Unions* (COSATU); the *Australian Council of Trade Unions* (ACTU); the newly formed trade union federation *Solidarity* in Indonesia; the *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (May the First Movement) in the Philippines and a representative from the Malaysian trade unions.[6]

Two national federations were critical to this venture. Firstly, left wing affiliates of the ACTU were concerned about the likely impact of Australia's embrace of the neo-liberal free trade model on job security and union rights in Australia, given the proximity of Asian nations and their commitment to export orientated industrialization based on ultra -cheap labour and unregulated conditions, most notably, long working hours and damaging health and safety conditions. Secondly, the COSATU leadership had a vision that the unique organizational style of unionism, which had developed during the apartheid struggle in the 1970s and 1980s might provide a model for a NLI.

A historical relationship between these two federations was forged through the international solidarity of the *Maritime Union of Australia* (MUA), a key affiliate of the ACTU when they imposed forty eight hour bans on South African shipping during the apartheid era. SIGTUR is a product of this past. However, the very genesis of this movement appears to embody a notable contradiction, much debated in the literature on labour internationalism, namely, the uneven geographical evaluation of labour mentioned above, which underpins the geography of corporate restructuring reflects job losses in some regions and an expansion of work opportunities in others. Therefore, one can only conclude that the objective interests of workers collide under the logic of free trade. For example, the oft quoted research of Haworth and Ramsey (1984: 63) into the threatened closure of Massey-Ferguson in Kilmarnock concludes, 'jobs and work lost in one country may benefit workers in another'. Whilst the CGT, which had an organized membership in the French Massey-Ferguson factory gave verbal support, there was no solidarity action with the dispossessed Scottish workers because the French benefitted from the closure. Recent case studies of attempts to construct global solidarity reveal the persistence of this constraint (Bieler & Lindberg, 2011:222-223)

Hence is it not reasonable to conclude the ACTU's desire to join forces with COSATU in the construction of a NLI in the global south could be interpreted as a self- interested, nationalistic,

defensive strategy in the face of job losses in Australia as global corporations relocate out of Australia into the newly industrializing nations of Asia, following the radical turn to free trade in the mid-1980s, when Australia changed its status from being one of the world's most protected economies to its present position as arguably the most open. Tariffs of less than five per cent created one of the lowest import protection regimes in the world. Since 1987, these reductions exceeded those required by GATT by fifty per cent (Sicklen, 1993: 19). Certainly, the data reveals that neoliberal free trade policies led to widespread factory closures in Australia as global corporations consolidated their operations in Asia (Lambert, 1999: 72-105; 2005: 597-313; 2007:75-97). This restructuring undermined the power of Australian unions in general and manufacturing and public sector unions in particular. For example, the *Australian Manufacturing Workers Union* (AMWU) has experienced a fifty per cent drop in membership over the past eleven years. Furthermore, this restructuring has had a destructive impact on society (persons/families/local communities) as Polanyi concluded, '…. the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society' (Polanyi 2001 [1944]: 3-4).

However, from the outset left union leaderships in the ACTU did not consider defensive protectionism and its implied politics: namely, the needs of Australian workers take precedence over those workers in nations competing with Australia. The strategic decision to prioritize solidarity relations, based on an equal recognition of the material, social and political needs of all workers was a value shaped by the *Communist Party of Australia (*CPA), which led to a remarkable history of an activist labour internationalism not bounded by the orthodoxies of the *International Trade Union Confederation* (ITUC). This activism included the decision not to dock and service Dutch troop carriers immediately after the Second World War when they were returning to retake 'their' Indonesian colony. Similarly, there were the above mentioned apartheid era bans. In this we see the centrality of agency and politics in shaping labour internationalism. Such a politicized, resistance based internationalism synergized with COSATU's vision of a southern movement.

COSATU's cardinal role resided in the articulation of a NLI organizing model, one tested in struggle, cast in a society structured by race/class power inequality. Such domination characterized the global south for the capitalist centre depended on coerced labour (slavery and indenture) rationalized through racism.[7] The transition to a new international division of labour (NIDL) exacerbated the experience of subjugation when elite classes were formed and sustained on the basis of cheap, unregulated labour power and negligible tax regimes, resulting in an intensification of exploitation at work *and* in society. The NLI organizing model aimed at transforming these resultant identities of domination to those of resistance. The origins and nature of this model is the focus of the next section.

WORKER CONTROL EMPOWERING AGENCY

E.P. Thompson (1963: 9-11) observed 'the working class did not arise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making….class is defined by persons as they live their own history' in ways where they 'feel an identity of interests'. In SIGTUR's formation past struggles produced an identity of interests, which *made* a labour internationalism quite distinct from the established model.

NLI identity was formed through linking southern labour movements, thereby integrating common historical experiences. These were shaped by the democratic union choice. COSATU played a lead role in this process and the task of building such style of unionism produced leadership, shaped by placing justice before self. There was a cost. The 'terrible' experience of prison, torture, transformed persons in a way alluded to by Gramsci (1977, 34-35) – *the making of a social will* which sought to impose itself on capitalist logic.[8]

These choices are socially produced. In the early 1970s these *African National Congress* (ANC) and *South African Congress of Trade unions* (SACTU) activists were part of discussions with intellectuals and students imagining then building such a movement.   Debates took an institutional form with the establishment of the *Institute of Industrial Education* in 1974. The new ideas on organizational democracy were recorded in the publication *The Workers' Organization* (IIE 1975). Worker control was a central proposition. Decision making was located at the shop floor, thereby pre-empting elected leaders acting independent of the base.   Voice created the productive personality Fromm (1947, 96-107) theorized. The problem is thus framed:

> 'There will always be some workers who understand better than others the need for a trade union. There will always be some workers who are more willing to work to bring about worker unity. These workers will become leaders among other workers. It is these workers who are chosen by the other workers as their representatives. The problem of union democracy is to keep a balance between these two things. The union must be organized in such a way that the representatives are responsible to the workers, and the workers can participate as much as possible in the organizational structure of the union. A union must be a combination of representation and participation. The task therefore is to create innovative organizational structures to maximize participation from the shop floor as well as ensuring leadership is accountable to the membership through a system of mandates and report backs' (IIE No.2 p87-88).

Participatory democracy is not only about structures. Leadership style, which promotes a *culture* of participation is critical. Hence in electing leaders there is a need to promote committed persons, who recognize the role of a leader is 'to participate in the workers' struggle….it is not a career or a way of getting rich….they must expect to live at the same standard of living as their fellow workers' (IIE No.2: 110). Autocratic and bureaucratic orientations are to be avoided. An autocrat is defined as 'somebody who is always telling other people what to do, and will never listen to criticism from other people…an autocratic leader will always think that he/she knows best, and can learn nothing from the workers or anybody else' (IIE, No.2: 31). A bureaucratic approach is spawned when 'the union moves out of the factory and into an office'. As a consequence full time officials believe that they run the union, not the workers. Everything is left to the officials who end up 'spending more time having tea with management than talking to the workers' (IIE, 1975, No.2: 26). These choices created enhanced agency, which later became central to the NLI project.

The orientation was deepened by the renaissance of Marxist theory in South Africa in the early 1970s. This included a critique of structuralist Marxism, which was reinterpreted to create space for agency. The world could be changed through research, a sense of history as present and collective action. These theoretical developments were connected to a practical engagement with the working

class.[9] These ideas informed South African unionism during the 1980s leading to the formation of COSATU in 1985, which played a key role in the 1994 democratic transition.   In this we witness the power of ideas when grounded in movement. These perspectives shaped a NLI, which reproduced participatory democracy at the global level.

INNER POWER OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

Movement power of movement resides in persons uniting in a common cause and in this choice discovering the unique power of body, mind, imagination and spirit. Through this choice, persons assume full responsibility in the face of implacable forces, they choose who they are, what they will become (Sartre, 1962: 24-25). For Erikson, this personal growth cannot be separated from societal change. The growth of identity is intertwined with historical change, hence the significance of participatory structures replicating the South African experience of empowerment.

The structure is elemental: member unions from the global south participate in week long, bi-annual Congresses, which are organized by the Regional Coordinating Committee (RCC), a representative leadership structure, which meets annually. Since its inception, there have been nine Congresses across four continents: Latin America, Africa, Asia and Australia.[10] The Congresses are live in events, averaging around one hundred and twenty delegates from thirty two nations in the global south.   In contrast to the established labour internationals (ELI) style, SIGTUR Congresses are driven from the floor through workshops and plenary debates. There are no procedural controls hence delegates can intervene without restraint. Debates are spirited. The Congresses conclude with short action statements, setting immediate two year goals.

Struggle cultures are presented in the evenings, taking the form of song and what the Koreans call, 'body talk'. This is the voice of workplace and street, reflecting the genesis of a movement culture of the global south.   These expressions contradict commodification, articulating a justice aspiration, creating moments of shared emotion and spirit, which are the life blood of resistance movements. Participants were formed in the crucible authoritarian regimes, which characterized the global south. This applied to Argentina, Brazil, South Africa and many of the African nations, South Korea, the Philippines, Indonesia, Timor Leyte and Thailand where the birth of democratic unions linked workplace and broader liberation struggles for democracy (Lambert & Webster 1988; Webster 1988; Seidman 1994).

A common experience of racism, exploitation and repression expressed through these participatory structures consolidated common political values, which sustained a single movement across four continents and thirty two nations for the past two decades. Kim Dal-sik, General Secretary of the *Korean Public Services & Transportation Union,* (KPTU), after being jailed for organizing a 'go slow' for disrupting transport systems to force companies to abolish the irregular work system, stated, 'I am an elected leader. I have no choice. I must continue to lead the struggle against irregular work, even if it means they throw me back into jail'.[11] Dita Sari, a leader of democratic unions in Indonesia, chose not to accept the Reebok human rights award and an accompanying check of US$50 000 in March 2002. This was a huge amount of money for a poorly resourced Indonesian union. The award was to be presented by Robert Redford, Desmond Tutu and other international celebrities at a glittering ceremony planned to coincide with the Winter Olympics at Salt Lake City. In a letter to the Reebok CEO, she stated,

We know how you treat your workers in the Third World. I know because I helped organize them and carried out actions with them. We know you paid your workers less than a dollar a day when your sneakers were selling for a hundred and that you rented the police to destroy us. Understanding this, we feel that it isn't appropriate for you to put the lid on the wrongs you've committed toward workers by giving this kind of award.[12]

Malaysian union leader Arokia Dass's personal identity is inseparable from the colonial past and its impact on his father as an indentured laborer.

> I am a product of the indentured labor system. My father was forcibly transported from India to Malaysia. I grew up in semi-slave conditions. They controlled the workers through alcohol – indentured Indians became inveterate drunkards. The system shaped our psychology. We internalized domination, we felt powerless, fearful, docile, compliant.

> I experienced inner feelings of racial inferiority my whole life. What changed me was an experience when I went back to Southeast India where my father came from.

> When I saw a person die of hunger in front of me something inside of me snapped. I turned around and saw that there was so much food. Why should this person die of hunger? I realized that religion had no answer to this question. I wanted the eradication of poverty. I started reading Marx. I became a socialist. I realized that we had to change these feelings inside of us. We had to think. We had to discover the poor have a history - otherwise there is no present and no future. Without this sense of history we are half human – we exist without a soul.[13]

This distinctive southern identity is the mobilizing foundation of this relatively new movement. This is where resistance potential against free trade resides in contrast to ELI, which, notwithstanding notable exceptions, has adopted a social dialogue strategy, seeking to influence the power elites at international forums. The opposing styles maybe summarized thus:

	Leadership E LI	Leadership NLI
Leadership culture	Individual career Five Star hotel Business class travel	Activist Struggle Choice Experienced repression
Social relations.	Sense of Status	Sense of Equality Sense of community;

Social identity	Labour leader of significance contributing positively to trade unionism	The dispossessed
Vision	Hotel View Linked with power elites	Street view Linked with the dispossessed
Politics	Committed to Neo-liberal globalization with a human face. Lobby politics. union rights & decent work	Committed to Post- neoliberal model, yet t to be determined. Movement politics.

These distinctive choices are a product of southern histories of dispossession and they inform movement strategy. Leadership and movement are sustained by building a counter power aimed at challenging free market logic.

CONSTRUCTING COUNTER POWER

Three decades of free trade hegemony has undermined belief in an alternative. Notwithstanding Occupy Wall Street and what it might presage, ELI ideas and action for the most part are self - limiting. This orientation, in the main, views free trade as a positive jobs and economic well-being strategy, provided union rights are respected and decent work secured. Critics are considered dreamers disconnected from the real world.

During the 1990s, SIGTUR was itself narrowly focused on trade union rights, hence the identity SIG (*TUR).* During this period the formation concentrated on defending these rights in terms of ILO Conventions 87 (freedom of association) and 98 (collective bargaining rights) motivated by a political vision which Olle and Schoeller's (1984) critique, namely, that it is possible to achieve a degree of equalization of differentiated development through asserting these rights.

Over the past decade participant federations (KCTU, COSATU and CITU) mobilized mass protests against free trade agreements and against privatizations, which deepened SIGTUR 's politics beyond union rights to a critique of the free trade paradigm. Whilst the rights struggle obviously remains central, the negation and uneven geography of these rights is now grounded within a political economy of free trade, which critiques the neo-liberal conception of equal, non-coercive exchange. There is a growing political awareness of how accumulation on a global scale centralizes and concentrates capitalist power where competition produces its opposite – monopoly power in the form of giant global corporations in every economic sector. The more free trade is expanded, the fiercer the competition and the faster the tendency toward centralization. This is a process of accumulation by dispossession, which spawns insecurity, disorganizing society (Harvey, 2003: 137-183; 2010a: 289-315). Exploring a counter-power to this logic is critical.
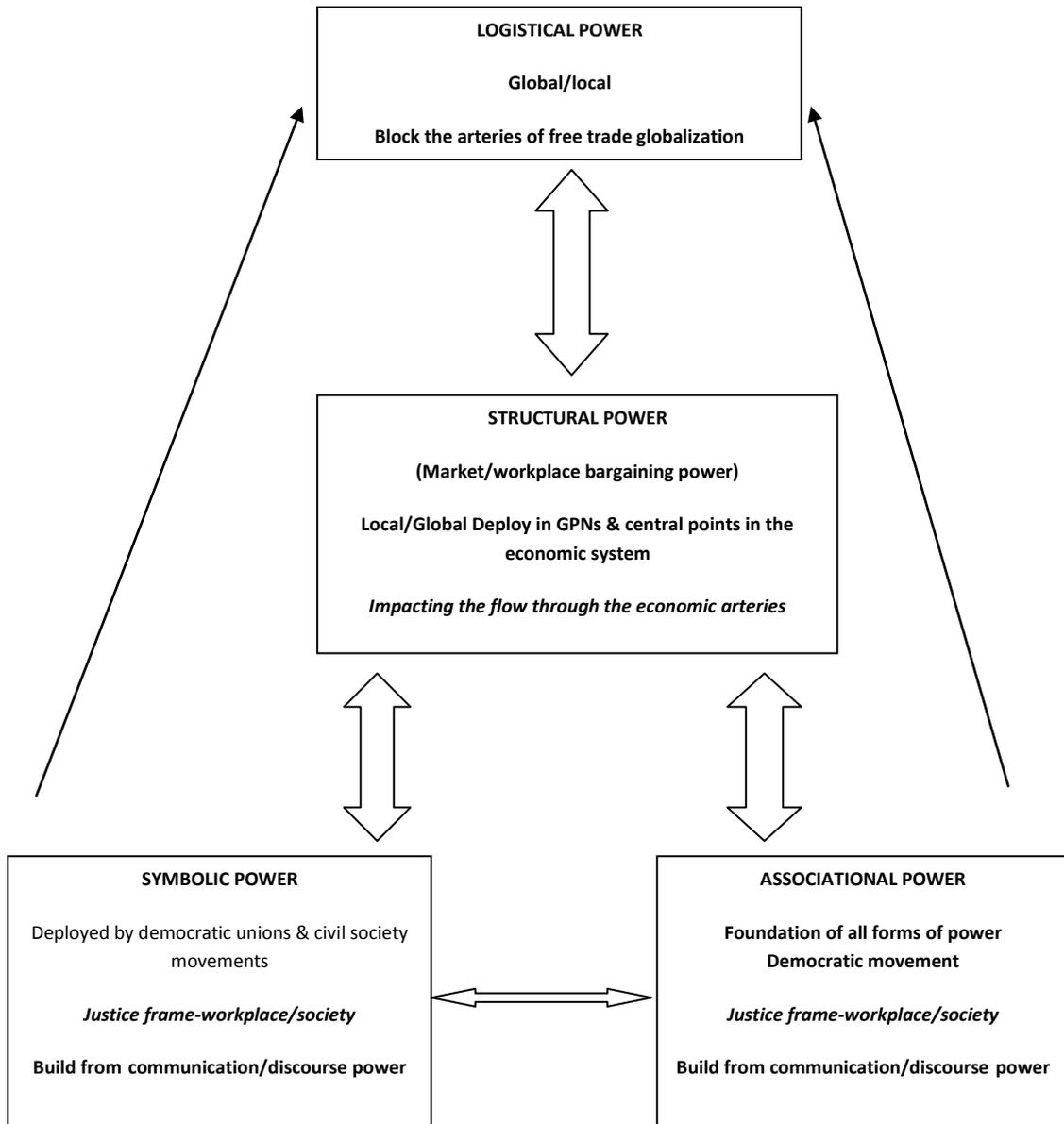
Grounding Globalization (Webster et.al., 2008: 11-13) further develops Silver's (2003, 18) power typology. She draws on Wright's (2000: 962) distinction between associational and structural power. Associational power is defined as 'various forms of power which result from the formation of collective organisation of workers (trade unions and political parties)'. Structural power is the power which accrues to workers 'simply as a result of their location in the economic system'. Wright distinguishes two subtypes of structural power: market bargaining power which results directly from tight labour markets and workplace bargaining power resulting from 'the strategic location of a particular group of workers within a key industrial sector.'

Silver (2003: 13) makes use of this distinction to argue that market bargaining power can take several forms: the possession of scarce skills which are demanded by employers; low levels of general unemployment; and the ability of workers to pull out of the labour market entirely and survive on non-wage sources of income. Workplace bargaining power accrues to workers who are enmeshed in tightly integrated production processes where a localised work stoppage can disrupt much more widely. Different forms of structural power require different forms of organisational strategies by trade unions, in other words, different associational strategies. The rise of global production networks (GPNs) based on complex, tightly integrated systems of contracting out segments of the production process, offers a new window of opportunity to leverage structural power (Coe et.al. 2008; Cumbers et.al. 2008). However, the rise of precarious forms of work within these networks is an obstacle to building associational power at the different worksites in the network.[14] Advances in this sphere depend upon the vision and commitment of progressive unions to experiment with new forms of organizing which connects with these marginalized workers.

Silver's analysis can be further extended by introducing the concept of symbolic power, which is pertinent in the global south, given the conditions of late industrialization. – The injustice frame is a significant dimension of mobilizing movement power, for it challenges fatalism: suffering in everyday life is not 'written in the stars' and needs to be morally condemned (Tarrow , 1998: 111). In *Grounding Globalization,* we further extend the analysis by highlighting the significance of logistical power , a sub-type of structural power .The highly integrated nature of the global economy, which is an propelled by free trade, makes the disruption of GPNs, trade, corporate production and global finance a compelling form of power. Unlike market bargaining power and workplace bargaining power, which rests on the ability of workers to withdraw from production, logistical power takes matters into the workplace, onto the landscape where workplaces are located and into globalization's transportation and communications systems. Shipping boycotts or go slows; trucking go slows in peak hour traffic; blocking roads and disrupting communications systems are the new weapons of the dispossessed. These interventions can wreck the extraordinarily tight scheduling of just-in-time production systems, which require precise windows in transportation logistics. Logistical power is the big gun in the arsenal of society and will only succeed if carefully prepared and framed as symbolic power – a radical, non-violent method in the justice struggle.   Social dialogue politics excludes logistical power, whereas the NLI views global corporations, global finance and their political allies as enemies on the battle battleground, not partners in a common project. The former position has lost a sense of conflicting class interests, whilst the latter views logistical power as a mode of action in the tradition of radical disobedience of Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. If economies across the globe are disrupted in calculated and coordinated lighting strikes the seemingly impregnable power of neoliberalism will be shaken. In so doing, there is a need to

synchronize forms of power. The potential relationships between different forms of power are captured in the following diagram.

SYNCHRONIZING COUNTER-POWER

LOGISTICAL POWER

Global/local

Block the arteries of free trade globalization

STRUCTURAL POWER

(Market/workplace bargaining power)

Local/Global Deploy in GPNs & central points in the economic system

Impacting the flow through the economic arteries

SYMBOLIC POWER

Deployed by democratic unions & civil society movements

Justice frame-workplace/society

Build from communication/discourse power

ASSOCIATIONAL POWER

Foundation of all forms of power
Democratic movement

Justice frame-workplace/society

Build from communication/discourse power

NLI is moving beyond the traditional power sources of unions through synchronizing these with the new. The capacity to trigger structural and logistical power depends upon the solidity of associational power strengthened by symbolic power. The strategic choice to ground the NLI in democratic unionism where associational power can evolve was a critical one, for if the initiative was open to all forms of unionism this potential would be diluted. Agency and identity analysed earlier,

are the key to embracing more radical strategies. However, operationalizing these new forms of power is a test of political will and strategic imagination for it is a step forward to envisage options and a giant leap to operationalize them.

During the 1990s SIGTUR gained invaluable experience in deploying logistical power through organizing shipping boycotts against anti-union laws. Such power is based on an appreciation of the flows of global capitalism. Harvey (2010b:vi) observes, 'Interrupt, slow down or, even worse, suspend the flow and we encounter a crisis of capitalism in which daily life can no longer go on in the style to which we have become accustomed'. The aim of logistical power is to selectively disrupt these flows as a last resort, when all attempts to negotiate change have failed. Because the ramifications are serious, firing the big guns sparingly is effective.

During the 1980s, the newly elected Labor Government embraced free trade, imposing labour market flexibility, whilst retaining a bargaining role for unions. In contrast, the conservative Liberal/National Coalition formulated an individual contract policy, which sought to marginalise unions. A Coalition came to power in Western Australia in 1993 and decided to implement this policy. When attempts by the ACTU to negotiate failed, SIGTUR decided to apply a shipping boycott on trade between Australia and South Africa.

A precondition of such action is a deep solidarity connection between movements. Memories of ACTU support for the ANC's anti-apartheid campaign were still fresh. In particular, the forty-eight hour bans which the MUA placed on South African shipping took on a symbolic significance. When the ships were docked, cabins of black crew members were inspected and if they were not up to standard, the cargo would not be offloaded until they had been refurbished. The COSATU Central Executive Committee (CEC) took a principled decision that they would impose a shipping boycott, unless the legislation was withdrawn. A senior delegation visited the South African Embassy in Pretoria and warned the Ambassador. This was relayed to the Premier of Western Australia, who requested a six am meeting with the State Secretary of the ACTU at an inner city car park. He stated that he would cut across his Minister for Industrial Relations and abandon the legislation if the ACTU withdrew the shipping boycott. He was also concerned about the harm being done to the Australian image by unprecedented Embassy protests in India and other Asian countries. The laws were abandoned and the actions called off. However, a logistical intervention was triggered two years later when the government again tried to reintroduce the laws. Dock-workers across all South Africa's major ports withdrew their labour for a day and marched to the city centres in protest against the renewed attack on Australian unions. Large numbers participated in the Durban marches, holding aloft banners proclaiming their commitment to Australian workers who had stood by them in their fight against apartheid. Australian ships were left stranded. During the 1998 maritime dispute, shipping was again blocked when the Coalition, elected at a federal level in 1996, sought to de-unionize the waterfront.

There was a salutary setback in the midst of this intense resistance. In preparation for the second intervention in 1997 the ACTU requested a senior COSATU leader visit Australia to deepen the ties through presenting the solidarity relationship at workplace meetings. The CEC sent the Deputy General Secretary of the *South African Transport & Allied Workers Union* (SATAWU). At a meeting of senior leaders soon after his arrival, he raised concerns over the planned boycott action, but

retreated when questioned whether or not COSATU had formally jettisoned the action. After two days of factory visits he then requested that he return to South Africa to manage the boycott. He failed to make contact and the Australian unions discovered he was a key negotiator on the privatization of Port Authorities and later became a member of the board of the Durban Port Authority. The boycott clashed with his new found 'business leadership role'. The General Secretary of SATAWU then contacted the ACTU and stated the Deputy's retraction should be ignored. Boycotts were triggered combined with the above mentioned mass protest marches. This incident illustrates the central argument of this paper: the salience of agency culture. This leader had assumed a dual role: board member profiteering from privatization *and* elected senior union official. Such a stark contradiction is diluted by social dialogue politics wherein the share price and profit are viewed as benefitting workers *and* the new business elite. We see in this the first signs of the emergence of two COSATU's. The NLI exposes these contradictions, generating internal political struggle for the maintenance of a progressive stance on neoliberalism. NLI has the potential to strike down domestic compromise, sustaining a united international class struggle position.

Following a review of these skirmishes SIGTUR argued *systematic preparations* for the deployment of logistical power were critical. Thus a special declaration of intent to form a global union between the MUA and SATAWU was signed at the 5th Congress of SIGTUR held in Johannesburg in November 1999. The essential purpose was to deepen the connection between the two unions making it easier to respond swiftly during periods of crisis. These modest beginnings evolved into a major initiative driven by the MUA to similarly prepare port workers and their unions across the globe through the formation of the *Mining and Maritime Global Network.* The other aspect of logistical power which is being tested is the relationship between finance capital, the share market and corporations. SIGTUR was deeply involved in the late 1990s campaign against the global mining corporation Rio Tinto through successfully mobilizing protest action across the global south and through intervening in shareholder meetings and pressurizing large institutional investors.

Finally, there is a spatial dimension to all these forms of power. Harvey (1989: 226) observes, 'Command over space is a fundamental and all pervasive source of social power in and over everyday life'. For Massey (2005: 85), 'Global space, as space more generally, is a product of material practices of power…What is at issue are the constantly- being-produced new geometries of power, the shifting geographies of power relations'. Confronted by capital's (corporate/finance) command over space, which has created new geometries of power, unions have no option but to construct new spatial relations from below, through place to place cyberspace communications, which are patterned on the geography of global corporations as well as linking public sectors. Such a production of space creates an opportunity to unleash communication power (Castells, 2009: 299) in that it presents scope for movements to frame the issues in ways which have the potential to raise social consciousness of the impacts of free trade. Since the discursive moment is 'a form of power, it is a mode of formation of ideas and beliefs' (Harvey, 1996: 83) building global communications links is a critical consolidation of movement power, for as Sassoon (1996: 7) contends, 'Those who define, create. 'Democratic' politics….. is a battlefield in which the most important move is that which decides what the battle is about, what the issue is.' Such a production of space synchronizes the scalar relations between the different forms of power. In this regard SIGTUR is experimenting with constructing spatial relations within global corporations as a way of synchronizing collective bargaining. This general direction is challenging for as Bieler and Lindberg

(2011: 223) conclude, 'This is a formidable organizational task, taking into account the differences between countries in labour law, negotiation systems, and union cultures'. SIGTUR is involved in a venture linking workers in the Hyundai factories in Chennai and Seoul. Hyundai leaders from Korea travelled to Chennai to meet Indian leaders who were members of CITU to explore ways in which the Koreans could be in solidarity with the Indian struggle for recognition. The Koreans participated in a protest action, where striking workers linked arms and formed a human chain surrounding the factory. Indian leaders travelled to Seoul to participate in a planning meeting. The ultimate aim is to coordinate the timing of collective bargaining with a view to simultaneous action, including logistical 'go slows' when appropriate. This case indicates that these impediments and be overcome, providing the different national unions are members of the same global movement. Hence the need for an activist internationalism. Notwithstanding the sense of empowerment these Hyundai meetings produced, the acid test is transforming these thin structures into a more permanent organization.[15]

The further advancement and consolidation of these actions is dependent on SIGTUR sustaining a commitment to resistance politics, which in turn is dependent on reproducing a political agency determined to oppose free trade. The conclusion highlights the fact that agency as a contested terrain, even though a majority are committed to a struggle against neoliberalism.

CONCLUSION

Samir Amin (*ref to his input at the workshop)* has argued that this moment of multiple crises demands 'audacious thinking' and 'a shift from defensive to offensive struggles' for 'de-monopolization, de-financialisation and de-globalization'. In a similar vein, SIGTUR (2010) has called for the establishment of a *Futures Commission,* bringing together intellectuals and movement leaders to give content to a post-neoliberal political agenda strategically grounded in short, medium and long term vision and transformational demands. Significantly, this proposal has become the focus of political contestation within SIGTUR. As outlined in the introductory section, the existence of competing political ideologies and strategies has implications for the nature of the response to neoliberalism.

Inside SIGTUR a senior COSATU national office bearer, who is deeply involved in the ITUC strategy of lobbying elites at major international forums stated his opposition to a *Futures Commission:*

> 'Such a proposal appears to be questioning the future of capitalism and whether socialism is the best answer. Are we ready for socialism? We don't have the power. SIGTUR should stick to south/south cooperation. We should not push ideological differences to the foreground. If you look at SIGTUR's identity, it is the Southern Initiative on *Trade Union Rights.* In the past we have had ideological debates which have been divisive. Let us define labor rights as our priority. We should be looking to giving globalization a human face'.

This position negates the validity of a struggle for an alternative to free trade, limiting the movement's role to labor rights and lobbying within a social dialogue frame over movement politics and campaigns with regard to the crises of climate change, global finance and insecure work. However, a majority of the RCC challenged this position. The Nigerian delegate stated that this orientation has 'made us beggars at these forums….we have to mobilize society and confront the

state. Unregulated markets cause the crisis, yet the elites say we need more de-regulation – how is that for logic?' The Argentinian leader contended, 'The climate justice movement has to become one of the big movements of the global south. The movement has to be built through grass roots campaigning'. The Korean leader observed, 'These forums have lost their legitimacy – we should not become trapped in these frameworks – we need to make a peoples' alternative visible'. Significantly, a majority of the RCC are committed to movement politics and the creation of a *Futures Commission* as a process of imagining an alternative to free trade and building global counter-movement with the power to transform. If a genuine movement against neoliberalism is to evolve, a vision of what is being struggled *for* has to be developed.

In struggling to formulate a post-neoliberal vision, SIGTUR fills a space in the architecture of labor internationalism through the spatial linkage of democratic unions in the global south. This geography differs markedly from the linkages from the south to the European center of ELI, which continues to reflect a political dominance of the north within labor internationalism and an accommodation with neoliberalism. This new configuration is energized by a political culture of human agency shaped by the colonial histories of the south and committed to a struggle against the free trade in all its manifestations. Notwithstanding political contestation within SIGTUR, which is a sign of a vibrant democratic culture, a majority view SIGTUR as *one* element in an overarching, yet to be constructed, global counter movement for justice, equity, democratic participation. This counter-movement would become a movement of movements, striving to unite in a single endeavor those who are being dispossessed by free trade.   A new global movement identity could emerge as the dispossessed struggle for liberation synchronized at all levels: local, national, regional and global. This may come to be viewed by history as the greatest of freedom struggles, given both the necessary scope of the action and the array of obstacles to be confronted. SIGTUR aims to continue to build its capacity so that the democratic unions in the global south can contribute to this critical venture.

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[1] One of the focuses of my academic work is longitudinal research based on five year cycles, utilizing surveys and qualitative interviews, to capture the lived experience of insecurity flowing from market restructuring. See Lambert 2010, 2007, 2005.

[2] Bieler and Lindberg state, 'The Gini coefficient, which ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 100 (complete inequality) indicates that global inequality rose steadily from 43 in 1980 to 67 in 2005.

[3] Throughout this paper I use the term free trade as a shorthand for the overarching neoliberal model of self regulating trade, investment finance.

[4] The two most notable exceptions are the evolution of the GUF, *Unions Network International* (UNI) and their remarkable campaign against the global corporation, Quebecor. The other is the global initiatives by SEIU.

[5] Competition is fought through spatial fixes that exploit geographic differences in labour standards and the uneven evaluation geographic evaluation of labourers. Harvey (2000, 24) defined spatial fixes as the attempt to resolve the internal contradictions of capital accumulation spatially. Silver (2003, 39) argued that this attempt takes the form of 'the successive geographical relocation of capital'.

[6] Lambert and Webster provide an account of SIGTUR's development (2001, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008).

[7] Commodity relations under capitalist development builds upon the experience of race during the colonial period captured poignantly by Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* (1981 [1902]: 27) when Marlow reflecting on the company's chief accountant, who in the midst of the suffering of blacks brought from 'all the recesses of the coast' worked 'bent over his books, making correct entries of perfectly correct transactions; and fifty feet below the doorstep I could see the still tree tops of the grove of death'.

[8] I spent ten years recording the memories of activists from the 1950s (Lambert 1987). The 'terrible' experience they spoke of deepened their commitment and expanded their being through a sense of connectedness and purpose within the movement. There was a strong legacy of Gandhi that the ANC drew on during this period, namely the transformative power of suffering in the struggle for justice.

[9] Political Scientist, Richard Turner had a profound impact on political thinking. He returned to South Africa in the early 1970s, having completed his doctorate on Sartre at the Sorbonne. He wrote *The Eye of the Needle,* which explored utopian thinking. Edward Webster reflects on Turner's impact: There was a profound feeling of personal liberation being able to explore all these ideas and connect with them in a very action oriented way, and I think this is what was so central to Rick's philosophical position. The necessity of utopian thinking applied to all aspects of life. You could actually think about how the world could be different – not just the world, but how personal relationships could be different; how bringing up children could be different; how schools could be different. This utopian thinking was radical at a level of ideas *and* practice' (Interview, Edward Webster, March 2009).

[10] Congresses have been organized in Australia (3), India (2), South Africa, Korea, Thailand and Brazil.

[11] Key not speech given at the State Conference of the *Maritime Union of Australia,* (MUA), 22nd February 2011.

[12] Dwyer, Leslie. 2002. 'Reprimand for Reebok'. Extract from an email. 25 March 2002.

[13] Arokia Dass, interview 8 November 2001, Seoul, South Korea.

[14] This is a central issue in the book I am working on with Andrew Herod, *Globalization & Precarious Work: Ethnographies of Accommodation & Resistance.*

[15] There are a number of similar cases. For example, Indonesian workers who are members of the federation KASBI, which is affiliated with SIGTUR, took strike action when the company refused to pay the minimum wage, nor were workers receiving properly calculated overtime payments. The construction company that they worked for, Readymix, is owned by an Australian company Boral. The AMWU made contact with Boral and warned them that action would be taken against them in Australia if they failed to rectify the illegal practices in Indonesia. Boral intervened and workers received the wages and overtime payments and other transportation and housing allowances they were due.

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