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## **Abstract**

*This thesis is driven by a single focus of inquiry. This is to ascertain how strong a relationship exists between the practice of trade union internationalism and labour revitalization. It attempts to answer this question by exploring the extent to which trade unionists' assessments of their own union's international work correspond to one analytical framework drawn from the field of labour revitalization studies.*

*This core question is framed by a survey of the field of labour internationalism studies that traces the classical roots of the discipline and maps out the proliferation of different directions of work in the field since the 1990s. In so doing it suggests a need for an approach that can straddle these different lines of empirical and theoretical development and achieve a new, overarching and unifying assessment. The field of labour revitalization studies is also surveyed and one particular model selected as showing promise for this purpose. That is the model offered by Frege and Kelly (2004). This model focuses on the strategic choices that unions make in their attempts to survive and to build themselves in an increasingly hostile environment. It also employs a four-dimensional definition of the meaning of 'revitalization' in this context.*

*The empirical basis of the thesis derives from research interviews conducted with trade union officials and officers within the family of global unions, within union organizations at the European level and within British trade union structures. The analytical discussion that constitutes the substantive core of the thesis is organized according to the themes*

*suggested by the six strategies of union revitalization that are employed by the chosen model. The picture that emerges is one that shows substantial correspondence between trade unionists' assessments of their organizations' international work and labour revitalization perspectives in a number of strategic areas and at some organizational levels. It is also one that is characterized by a degree of heterogeneity, however. In broad terms, for instance, whilst such correspondence seemed strong at the levels of the experience of global and British trade unionism, they appeared weaker at the European level.*

*The thesis concludes by arguing that this revitalization model is one that, in the main, fits well with the kinds of assessments of labour internationalism offered in research interviews. Whilst the assessments of some types of international work that did not fit so well may have resulted from, largely practical, limitations of methodology, it was evidently the case that several major areas of international work resonated strongly with the model. This gives grounds for a view that internationalist work is indeed, in many of its aspects, helping to revitalize trade union life at a number of structural levels.*

## **Glossary**

ATTAC	Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide aux Citoyens
BIFU	Banking, Insurance and Finance Union
BWI	Bretton Woods Institution
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEEP	European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CNM	Brazilian Confederação Nacional dos Metalúrgicos
COHSE	Confederation of Health Service Employees
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CUT	Central Unica dos Trabalhadores
CWU	Communications Workers' Union
DFID	Department For International Development
EC	European Commission
ECB	European Collective Bargaining
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EIF	European Industry Federation
EMF	European Metalworkers Federation
EPSU	European Federation of Public Service Unions
ETF	European Transport Federation
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
EU	European Union
EWC	European Works Council
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FDI	Foreign Domestic Investment
FIET	International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GMB	General, Municipal, Boilermakers' Union
GPMU	Graphical, Print and Media Union
GUF	Global Union Federation
ICEF	Chemical, Energy and Allied Workers International
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers Union
ICFTU	International Confederation of Free Trade Unions
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
IFI	International Financial Institution
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMEC	International Maritime Employers Committee

IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMWA	International Working Men's Association
ITF	International Transport Federation
ITS	International Trade Secretariat
IUF	International Union of Foodworkers
MEI	Media and Entertainment International
MIF	Miners' International Federation
MNC	Multi-national Company
MNCB	Multi-national Collective Bargaining
MSF	Manufacturing, Services and Finance
NAFTA	North Atlantic Free Trade Area
NALGO	National Association of Local Government Officers
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NILS	New International Labour Studies
NLI	New Labour Internationalism
NUMAST	National Union of Marine, Aviation and Shipping Transport Officers
NUPE	National Union of Public Employees
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSI	Public Services International
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions
RMT	Rail, Maritime, Transport
SD	Social Dialogue
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
SERTUC	South East Trade Union Congress
SIGTUR	Southern Initiative on Globalisation and Trade Union Rights
SMU	Social Movement Unionism
TGWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TIE	Transnational Information Exchange
TNC	Trans-national Company
TUAC	Trade Union Advisory Committee
UAPME	European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
UN	United Nations
UNI	Union Network International
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
WEF	World Economic Forum
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WICEJ	Women's International Coalition for Economic Justice
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

## **Preface**

The idea for this thesis began with three things: the reading of a book; events in the world; and a change of life. The book was Kim Moody's *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy* (1999). I was impressed by the sense of working class recovery that Moody was able to convey. As someone who had been engaged in countless public and private discussions and debates on the subject of the state of the working class as an agent for historical change, and as someone also who was strongly of the unfashionable view that the international working class, far from being a spent political force, still retained the potential to change the world, I found Moody's well evidenced optimism refreshing. What also struck me about the picture of recovery that Moody painted, was the international – and internationalist - character of that recovery.

It was real events, however, that crystallised the thought that we ('we' meaning my comrades and I on the British Left) were witnessing a turning point in the fortunes and directions of working class politics. The first, and most dramatic, event was the Seattle protests at the WTO ministerial conference in November 1999. After the great defeats inflicted upon British and American labour in the 1980s and the slow ('molecular' we said) recovery in working class confidence in the 1990s, our reaction to the Seattle protests was as much emotional as it was political. The drama of those protests was not just to do with the images of young people sitting down to resist being moved by 'techno-cops', amidst swirling clouds of orange tear gas. It was also to do with what we were learning by the day about the extraordinary mix of factors that had created the

phenomenon. It was radicalised teenagers mixing with veterans of the industrial battles of US labour from the 1930s. It was Stetson wearing Teamsters marching alongside of black-clad anarchists. It was also rallies organized by the largely conservative, and often protectionist oriented, organizations of US labour being addressed by representatives from unions in Africa and Latin America.

Finally, a decision to move back to my native North West of England provided the occasion for a taking stock of my career. I had spent twelve enjoyable years as a science teacher in the tertiary sector. The interests I was developing in trends in the international working class, however, led me to reconsider my goals and to look into the possibility of working in Higher Education. This I decided to do, and for that, I knew, I would need to obtain my doctorate.

Before and after commencing this thesis in 2000 there have been events and experiences that I have either reflected upon with new perspectives or that have presented new opportunities to reflect upon, and sometimes reconsider, long held views. Prior to starting to work on my research, for instance there were the many discussions and semi-formal interviews carried out in Bangladesh with trade union officers and activists, particularly women textile worker activists. I was able to interview Abul Bashar, national President of the Bangladesh Jute workers union for more than forty years, during a trip in 1997. These experiences formed a kind of personal, formative backdrop that shaped some of the themes of inquiry for this thesis – as well as my initial interest in the area. Conducting this research has also led me to reflect back and draw upon more than twenty years of

experience as a branch magazine editor in the National Association of Local Government Officers (NALGO) (now merged into Unison), and as a membership representative, branch secretary and London regional representative in the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) (now merged into the University and Colleges Union (UCU)). Many of the personal recollections relating to international issues for trade unionists from this time helped in my interpretation of the research material.

Since commencing this research events have continued to move on apace in the realm of trade union internationalism itself. In October 2006, for instance the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) ended its 58 year existence to make way for the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) that heralded the first ‘unified world trade union confederation’ since 1948. January 2007 saw the announcement of the first global ‘super-union’ as the UK’s Amicus joined forces with the German IG-Metall and two major US unions, the United Steelworkers and the International Association of Machinists. These developments have made some of the comments and opinions of some of my research interviewees seem prescient.

My interest, then, in the topic of labour internationalism draws from a number of sources, mainly political, but personal also. Over the course of this research I have been through all of the highs and lows that are said to be normal during the course of a PhD. I have also found evidence that has strongly confirmed my intuitions from the start of the

research and evidence that has countered them. Throughout the research, however, my interest and commitment to the topic has never waned.

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