Mending the breach between labour and nature: environmental engagements of trade unions and the North-South divide[1]

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Abstract

In the past, environmental movements and labour movements have seen each other as opponents. Where labour movements have taken an interest in nature — in the first half of the 20th century - it was in the context of campaigning for spaces of recreation, and later as a necessary condition for a healthy life. In both cases nature has been constructed as 'the Other' of labour. The same can be said for environmental movements, which have aimed to defend, if not protect nature 'against labour'. This opposition has been mirrored in the academic field such that environmental studies have taken little account of labour; likewise, labour studies have largely ignored the environment. The authors argue that these oppositions are starting to be addressed within both the labour movement and academic research, largely as a response to the crisis of climate change which makes clear that both labour and the environment are threatened. Since environmental degradation and climate change are global issues the power relations between unions of the global North and South need to be tackled.

Conflicts between environmentalists and labour: nature as labour's "other"

Over the past forty years the relationship between environmentalists on the one hand and labour on the other has largely vacillated between distrust and suspicion at best through to rancour and open hostility at worse. Environmental movements have accused trade unions of defending jobs at any cost to nature, while trade unions have accused environmentalists of putting nature before workers' needs for jobs, and indeed, for survival.

If we look at the two movements historically there is evidence that labour movements in industrialised countries have viewed nature predominantly in two ways. In the early years, trade unions organised their response in the way we think that social movements act today. They founded "organisations to advocate and develop gender equality, consumers' interests (the cooperative movement), popular health and welfare, housing, culture in all its aspects,

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education, leisure activities, and human rights (including anti-colonial movements)" (Gallin, 2000: 4). For instance, the *International Friends of Nature* were founded 1895 in Vienna by a group of socialists, coming together through an advertisement in the *Arbeiter Zeitung* ("*Newspaper for Workers*", see: International Friends of Nature). In the UK, workers and "environmentalists" joined together on 24 April 1932 for an act of mass trespass when they walked across the grouse moors of Kinder Scout (owned by the landed gentry and wealthy industrialists) to protest at the lack of access to green spaces around the industrial cities of the north of England. The "right to roam" was initiated by the British Workers' Sports Federation (BWSF), largely made up of members and supporters of the Communist Party, and which enjoyed significant working class support. For these groups nature was a space for recreation and leisure that needed to be preserved and enjoyed.

The second way in which labour organisations have dealt with nature, has been in the context of the health and safety concerns for their members. They have fought against the pollution of water, air and soil when this constituted a threat to the health of workers and their families. Most of the time though, health and safety issues were and are dealt with within the workplace, where unions see to it that workers are protected from the hazards of the production process. Here, one could argue, they care for nature in the form of workers' bodies, although they may not formulate it this way. They see their work as caring for the social needs of workers of which health is an important part. In the image of nature as a space of recreation or an environment that needs to be protected from pollution, nature becomes labour*'s* "other". It is constructed as a place external to society and to the labour process (Smith 1996: 41). It may be a place that is pristine and completely different — the obverse of those places where work occurs or which society occupies. In neither case is nature seen as an integral part of the production process, as a source of wealth, as labour*'s* ally. This omission was already apparent in the first programme of the German Social Democratic Party, the Gotha Programme, where the first paragraph read: "Labour is the source of wealth and all culture, and since useful labour is possible only in society and through society, the proceeds of labour belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society." (cited in Marx 1875). In his critique, Marx argued, "Labour is *not the source* of all wealth. *Nature* is just as much the source of use values (...) as labour, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labour power" (Marx 1875). Both dimensions - nature as a source of use value, and human labour power as a part of nature - have been neglected in the history of the labour movement.

For environmental movements nature needs to be defended against uncontrolled and thoughtless industrialisation, and the productivism of capital and labour alike. Their point of departure is that there is a fundamental contradiction between production and ecology. In one of her influential publications, Carolyn Merchant formulates it in the following way: "The particular forms of production in modern society — industrial production, both capitalist and state socialist — creates accumulating ecological stresses on air,

water, soil, and biota (including human beings) and on society's ability to maintain and reproduce itself over time." (Merchant 1992: 9)

There are many environmental movements (just as there are many different forms of trade unionism), from nature conservationists, to environmental NGOs with considerable financial resources (WWF-UK income in 2011 was £57m (WWF-UK 2011)), to environmental justice movements, socialist ecologists, ecofeminists, and deep ecologists. One cannot do them justice with one definition. It is safe to say though, that when it comes to conflicts between industry and environmental protection they will put environmental protection first – after all, protecting the environment is their raison d'être. What they have in common with the labour movement though, is a construction of nature as labour's "other". In this case labour is the antithesis of nature; it is not part of the "natural world" but is a human construction that is removed from natural processes. Neither labour movements nor environmental movements see labour and nature as allies, needing each other to produce the material resources necessary for human survival.

The difficulty of seeing labour and nature as inseparable elements for the production of life (since without production there is no human life), is a result of their separation historically. In a process that accelerated with the industrial revolution, nature has become a private asset, just like the products of labour and nature, tools, machines, and buildings (Smith 2008, Castree 2010). For workers, privatised nature, nature that has become a "natural resource", stands on the other side of the capital-labour relationship, it is capital. Workers experience the protection of nature as a threat, not only to their jobs, but also to their identities as producers. From the point of view of environmentalists, workers are seen to be on the side of capital who regard nature only as an exploitable "natural resource", a means to an end for production. Both are caught in a contradictory structure that involves a trialectical relationship (Soja 1996) between labour, capital and nature. When unions defend their jobs at the expense of nature, they are at the same time defending the relations of production (the private appropriation of nature) under which they are themselves subordinated. Sweeney (2012) describes the paradoxical effects this can have, when unions defend the economic activities of politicians who act in an anti-labour fashion. The same can be said for environmentalists who criticise unions for defending their jobs without suggesting any alternatives that would allow workers a living without being at the mercy of those who own nature and control labour. What is lived as a conflict between environmental and labour movements is mirrored by academic disciplines' mutual disregard.

Where's the environment in labour studies, where's labour in environmental studies?

The fact that labour studies and environmental studies are separate spheres of research serves to reinforce the failure of researchers to appreciate the importance of their reciprocal significance and contribution. This shortcoming

has been carried through to the lecture theatre. While attention may be paid to production processes such as the impact of new technologies on labour, climate-motivated labour and production changes such as government regulations, changes in markets, the migration of production, are rarely discussed. Equally, there is little discussion as to how labour is responding to these changes. For example, what impacts will climate change motivated regulations have on the working lives of those who are employed in high carbon and consequently high risk industries? Work for many, as we know, is more than just bringing in a wage. It provides dignity, identity, and solidarity (Collinson 1992, Räthzel and Uzzell 2011). When industries are attacked (i.e. because they are seen to be damaging to the environment), those who work in those industries will also feel attacked.

It is striking that if one attends conferences on the human dimensions of climate change, very few papers focus on the workplace. With some confidence one can say that even less address labour issues in general or the position and role of trade unions towards climate change, whether in terms of their policy response or how climate mitigation and adaptation are affecting jobs or workers' rights. Likewise, conferences in the area of labour studies are silent on these issues. In the social environmental sciences – psychology, sociology, or economics - the focus of research, and what is carried across into the lecture theatre, is on changing consumer behaviour and largely comes under the heading of "behaviour change strategies" (e.g. Darnton 2008). These draw on theories from psychology and behavioural economics that are often individualistic and reductionist because they reduce people to de-socialised monads, taking decisions on their own (cf. Institute for Government 2009). To add "influences" from other people does not solve the problem because it only multiplies the number of monads conceived as meeting in a void. The societal relations (relations of production, relations of consumption, political and power relations (Uzzell and Räthzel 2009) that shape practices are neglected together with the "hardware" of such practices, infrastructures and technologies. Such research tends to concentrate on individual action in the home, in the supermarket, on holiday and through various transport means used to move between these locations. The closest these studies come to the workplace is the car that takes the commuter to work. Sustainable behaviour strategies in the workplace mirror those advocated for the consumers in general, such that research has focussed on how companies can implement, for example, "green travel plans" or encourage their workforce to recycle waste and turn lights off (Bartlett 2011). While these are valuable measures, they do not get to the heart of the matter, namely the production process itself and its impact on the environment. Environmental social scientists in turn have almost entirely ignored the impact of climate change on the psychology and sociology of workers, and their potential for collective as opposed to individual action.

The separation between environmental studies, focusing on the effects of production processes on nature, and labour studies focusing on the effects of production processes on workers can be traced back to the separation between natural sciences and social sciences. Bruno Latour (1993) argues that this

separation has its origins in the debate between Hobbes and Boyle, the latter arguing on the basis of experimentally created facts, the former on the basis of theories of the social (1993: 29f). Latour maintains that "things" and the "social" co-constitute each other and thus have to be studied in relation to each other. In a similar vein we suggest that production processes have to be studied as a relationship between humans and nature evolving within specific societal relations.

Some scholars have taken up the challenge to theorise this relationship. Predominantly, they come from a Marxist tradition (e.g., Vorst et al. 1993, Harvey 1996, Layfield 2008). O'Connor (1998) develops a theory of "human interaction with nature" and Foster (2000) re-constructs what he calls "Marx' Ecology", bringing together the writings of materialists and of Marx on nature and the human-nature metabolism, while Harvey theorises the social relations of nature from the perspective of a Marxist geography. While ecologists have criticised Marx and Marxists (Goldblatt 1996, Bramwell 1989, Smith 2001) for neglecting nature or conceptualising it only as a means to an end of human reproduction, others, like Pepper (1993), Gare (1995), Merchant (1992) have linked the ecological to Marxist theory. There is a lively debate around a Marxist or socialist ecology, especially in the journals *Capital, Nature, Socialism* and *Monthly Review*, but it has not been taken up in the fields of labour or environmental studies, with a view of providing a theoretical framework for empirical research.

New movements in the trade union movements

We use the plural of movement in this title because there is no such thing as a unitary labour or trade union movement. Differences and often conflicts exist on all levels, between sectors, within and between countries, and between and within unions of the global North and the global South. Nevertheless, while academic research remains largely corralled in its disciplines and sub-disciplines, union movements across the world have been moving fast to incorporate a concern for nature by taking on climate change as an issue of trade union policies (see Olsen and Kemter 2012).

This process has accelerated since the first international Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment (UNEP 2006), In the same year the ITUC was founded as a merger between the former International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the World Confederation of Labour. This was also the time when the first programme on climate change was agreed by an international union (see Murillo 2012). Since then, there has been a growing interest among trade union officials to incorporate the environment as an issue of climate change into trade union programmes. In many national and international unions special positions have been created for unionists to take responsibility for environmental issues and to formulate union positions on climate change.

Placing climate change issues on the trade union agenda requires a transformation of trade unions as organisations that are solely concerned with

workers' lives inside, or immediately around the factory walls. A transformation of unions would mean that they do not merely react to the capitalist crises, trying to defend the achievements of their past struggles, but would instead embark on new struggles in which they seek to become the inventors of new forms of production (see Henriksson 2012). Comprehensive union policies that merge the protection of workers and the protection of nature have several implications for trade union policies. They require that unions reinvent themselves as social movements, aiming not only to improve their members' lives but to take part in transforming societies and the present economic system. This implies a need to build alliances with environmental movements. Indeed, such alliances are forming in countries around the globe.

In the USA, the BlueGreen Alliance started with collaboration between the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers union (Stevis 2012, Sweeney 2012, Gingrich 2012). In South Africa, Earthlife is organising courses on environmental issues for unionists and collaborating with COSATU and NUMSA in the "One Million Climate Jobs Campaign" (Cock and Lambert 2012); in Brazil, the umbrella organisations for environmental organisations (Forum Brasileiro de ONGs e Movimentos Sociais para o Meio Ambiente e o Desenvolvimento, FBOMS) includes the national trade union CUT as a board member. Some unions, like the STTR (Sindicato dos Trabalhadores y Trabalhadoras Rurais de Santarem) in the Amazonian region, have not only allied themselves with environmental movements, but are themselves a grassroots environmental movement (Cândia Veiga and Martin 2012).

Here, as in many areas of the global South, the close connection between defending work and defending nature is evident and was exemplified by the work and commitment of the famous trade union leader Chico Mendes, who was both a unionist of the rubber tappers and an environmentalist. He paid for his commitment and engagement with his life (Revkin 2004). This tradition of trade union environmentalism is alive in parts of the Brazilian trade union movement, predominantly among agricultural unions and in other organisations like the landless movement (MTS) and Via Campesina (an international network of such). In other countries an alliance between agricultural workers and unions, and rural communities has yet to be developed. Bennie (2012) suggests that South African industrial and mining unions need to understand that rural communities are not necessarily keen to exchange their ways of life for an opportunity to work in what others may perceive as a modern industry, even if they are promised what is conventionally regarded as a better life. The rural communities he researched refuse to accept the label of being poor.

In South Korea and Taiwan, two of the fastest industrialising countries of Asia, trade unions and environmental movements are coming together after they have both seen their support in society dwindle. Liu (2012) suggests that unions and environmental movements need to learn from each another in order to not only be able to work together, but also to improve the success of their own political campaigns. In Australia, unions and environmentalists have been

working together as early as the 1970s, forming associations like the "Environmentalists for Employment" (Burgmann 2012). Today, trade union environmental policies have diversified and so have their alliances with different environmental movements and political parties in Australia (Snell and Fairbrother 2012). In none of the countries mentioned here are alliances between unions and environmental movements free of friction, due to a history of different discourses and political priorities of the respective movements. These frictions demonstrate that the "job versus environment" dilemma is far from resolved, even though it is now considered a false dichotomy by many scholars, politicians and unionists who argue that a "green economy" will provide many more "green jobs" than might be lost through measures enabling a transformation into low carbon societies.

There are now a number of publications trying to calculate how many additional jobs can be created if the present system would change to a "green economy" (see for instance: ITUC: Growing Green and Decent Jobs: http://www.ituc-csi.org/summary.html?lang=en accessed July 28, 2012). There are however a number of problems with the strategy of green jobs. First, such jobs are not necessarily well-paid, safe, and secure jobs, i.e., decent jobs. In order to not merely "greenwash" the existing economic system, it is necessary to examine the taken-for-granted growth perspective that underlies many green job strategies, to take the relationship between different production sectors within a country and globally into account, and to rethink the system of production that has led to climate change (Snell and Fairbrother 2012, Stevis 2012). The question is, whether a demand for green jobs leads to "shallow reforms" or whether it transcends the present forms of production and envisages an economic system beyond the growth paradigm (Cock and Lambert 2012, Barry 2012). For example, there is a view that "green jobs" and all other economic terms prefaced with the word "green" are an obfuscation — "a 'wolf in sheep's clothing", the wolf being a form of green capitalism which will deepen inequality and promote the further commodification of nature (Cock 2012: 1). Cock argues that attention should be given to creating "climate jobs". Notwithstanding this, it is important to remember that a radical trade union position that sees capitalism as the source of the global environmental destruction, does not necessarily lead to the formulation of radical positions on how to combat climate change (Bennie 2012).

If these questions are taken into account, the perspective of green jobs can overcome the jobs vs. environment dilemma by offering unions and workers a way to embrace climate change measures without fearing unemployment — at least theoretically. However, when a union is faced with the alternative of either supporting environmentally damaging production, which will create jobs immediately, or to oppose such a production for the sake of green jobs in an uncertain future, most will opt for the former (Räthzel and Uzzell 2011).

A radical agenda, fighting for "system change, not climate change" as demonstrators at the recent COP meetings in Copenhagen (2009) and Durban (2011) demanded, points to the root cause of climate change, namely profit and

therefore a growth-oriented production system. While such an agenda can provide a perspective to construct a long-term formulation of trade union policies, it will probably not be sufficient to convince unions at local levels who see their primary goal as fighting for their members' livelihood in the present. Strategies like the "One Million Climate Jobs Campaign" in South Africa (Alternative Information and Development Centre 2011) and the UK (Campaign against Climate Change 2010) are essential to develop awareness, arguments, and action for trade union policies at the local level and in the public domain. A shortcoming is that their demands are directed towards governments and only sometimes towards business. They involve unionists and workers as campaigners only, not as makers of their own futures. In our view, these campaigns need to be accompanied by strategies that involve workers directly in developing new forms of production that include a concern for nature and avoid its destruction. Such strategies would potentially transcend the existing capitalist system because they would necessarily challenge the existing private control over the means of production, the way in which goods are produced, as well as what kind or goods are produced for whom. One historic example of an attempt to involve workers into the transformation of production was the Lucas Aerospace Shop Stewards Combine Committee's plan to transform the production of (largely) weapons into the production of "socially useful" products (Wainwright and Elliott 1981, Cooley 1980, Räthzel, Uzzell and Elliott 2010). While climate change was not at the forefront of the debate during those times, many of the suggestions the Combine Committee made implied the reduction of energy consumption.

Rosa Luxemburg (1999) coined the concept of "revolutionary reformism", meaning that labour movements have to present alternatives for the day-to-day political agendas with the aim of improving the situation for workers now. But such alternatives should at the same time make a transformative agenda visible and achievable. They should sow the seeds of alternative forms of working and living in practice. It seems to us that a strategy that links the "green jobs" campaigns with a trade union programme making use of workers' skills and knowledge to explore and design ways in which industries (and services for that matter) can be converted into sites producing "socially useful and environmentally sound" products, would constitute such a strategy of "revolutionary reformism".

In this context it is noteworthy that although official union documents, as well as the views of influential unionists, are occasionally discussed politically and in scholarly work, we have almost no reliable knowledge through either quantitative or qualitative research of what workers in factories and offices think about climate change. Apart from the LOCAW Study[2] which is being

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[2] LOCAW: Low Carbon at Work: Modelling agents and organisations to achieve transition to a low carbon Europe. In a study funded by the European Union, the authors, together with researchers in Romania, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK, are investigating these questions in areas of small and heavy industry and public services. http://www.locaw-fp7.com/ (accessed March 20, 2012).

undertaken by the authors for the European Commission, we are only aware of the national surveys undertaken by the Labour Research Department, on behalf of the TUC in the UK. They survey union "Green Representatives" asking about trade union actions on environment and climate change in the workplace and the role of the trade union movement in those actions.

One of the major obstacles to the success of a global environmental trade union policy are the different perspective of unions due to their different national histories, the sector in which they organise, their strength in terms of membership, and their political convictions. Whether unions are closely related to government and political actors, or more flexible in choosing their allies, makes a difference in terms of whether they are willing and able to create new forms of cooperation with environmental movements. There is also a difference between international and national confederations and federations. While an international union may have the vision and resources to develop a broader perspective for environmental policies, a local union will be much more tied to the immediate, everyday interests of their members. This may act as a serious constraint on them not only envisaging but also practicing a broader social movement unionism that includes environmental concerns.

The North-South divide and climate change policies

Trade union histories and traditions do not only influence the ways in which unions formulate their interests within the societal context at large, they also shape their relations to the state and to labour parties in the respective countries. International solidarity has been a defining characteristic of trade unions since the 19th century (Waterman and Timms 2005), but it has usually meant unions supporting each other in their local struggles. The rise of the Internet has now made global protest possible but so far it is usually industry/sector specific. To incorporate a global phenomenon like climate change into the trade union agenda requires unions and their members to investigate the global effects of their local actions. In this respect, unions are a perfect example of "glocality" (Meyrowitz 2005), working on the local and the global level simultaneously.

However, there are numerous obstacles to a unified, glocal strategy of trade unions in the area of climate change (and not only there). Perhaps the most serious one is the divide between unions of the global North and unions of the global South. The history of colonialism continues to be reflected in North-South relations between unions. While there are also multiple differences between Southern unions on the one and Northern unions on the other hand, these are cross-cut by what Southern unionists experience as domination by Northern unions due to the latter's superior resources and organising power. While Northern unions practice solidarity in helping Southern unions with their resources and knowledge, this often comes at a price, namely a strategy of Northern unions to influence the political practices of their Southern colleagues. These power relationships thwart the possibilities of developing common

international environmental policies against climate change (Uzzell and Räthzel 2012).

This is apparent in the workings of the international manufacturing unions. As one unionist in the South put it bluntly: "The Northern unions have created the international unions a hundred years ago, they have the biggest resources, they own them. When the big boys want to do something it happens, no matter how much resistance there is from unions in the South". This was not a solitary statement. Talking to unionists in Brazil, South Africa, and India, we heard similar descriptions of the North-South relations within international unions from all our 13 interview partners in these countries, who belonged to 9 different unions. Some unionists in the North self-critically confirmed these perceptions.

With the strengthening of Southern Unions due to the relocation of manufacturing from the North to the South, these relationships might alter. For instance in Brazil we were told:

> After the creation of CUT in '83 and after the maturation process of CUT becoming strong as an institution and becoming more relevant in the society etc., during all those years the support of international cooperation was very important. But we realised, especially in the last four or five years, that that has changed. Because, as you know, when you have international support you have the international policies that come with that. And we realised more and more that the South-South cooperation is actually more suitable for us. Because – don't get me wrong here, but the perspective that comes from the international cooperation from Europe is very much like that, you know: "We have all the resources. We're going to help you and pay you and ... you should go in this direction and that direction." And we try to combine an agenda, but in most of the cases it's not what we want to, precisely, you know. And CUT as the main trade union confederation of Latin America is putting a lot of effort into South-South cooperation.

Our respondent is careful to appreciate the support they received from the North but it is clear that with their growing power and resources, Southern unions in the emerging economies will no longer want to subordinate themselves to Northern political strategies. One strategy is to work together to achieve more influence within international federations and confederations, another is to form South-South networks like SIGTUR. Yet another is to join a federation different from the ITUC. For instance, NUMSA and NUM in South Africa have recently joined the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), which formerly comprised predominantly unions of the countries oriented towards the Soviet Union and today has members largely from countries of the global South. As one unionist in India explained: "the WFTU is for class struggle and the ITUC is for class cooperation". Joining the WFTU is not only a decision that reflects the unions' impatience with North-South relationships, it is also a political decision as the statement of the Indian unionist shows. Some of the big unions in South Africa and in Brazil and India are more radically anti-capitalist than the majority of unions in the global North. However, in terms of including

climate change and environmental protection into the trade union agenda the WFTU has certainly a much longer way to go than the ITUC.

The power relations between Northern and Southern unions affect the possibility to create global trade union policies against climate change. Unions in the South tend not only to see climate change but also some climate change mitigation policies as an imposition from the North. While aware of the threat that climate change poses especially to the survival of populations in the South, they warn that some policies devised in the North can become a new form of imperialism, namely "eco-imperialism" as one unionist in South Africa put it. He was referring to the threat of border adjustments in Northern countries that would prevent Southern goods produced with lower technology and thus higher emissions from entering Northern countries. In the absence of technological transfer and funding to enable Southern countries to develop similar technologies this would considerably weaken the economies of Southern countries. In India we were told (only half jokingly) that climate change is a conspiracy of Northern countries to prevent Southern countries to develop economically.

Such remarks become wholly understandable once one considers the living conditions of workers in the developing countries. It is the enormous economic and political inequalities between the countries of the North and the South that are at the heart of the disagreement between unions as well as states. As we know, while the North is the highest emitter per capita[3], the South suffers predominantly from its effects.

That does not mean, though that the industrial unions in the emergent economies of Brazil, South Africa, and India, respond in similar ways to the threat that climate change poses to their countries. In South Africa there are some passionate activists in the second biggest union, NUMSA, the union of metalworkers, who are pushing for a socially owned and democratically controlled "renewable energy sector", arguing that green jobs can be just as exploitative and hierarchical as brown jobs in the fossil fuel sector. While the character of the jobs is also discussed in Northern unions, who demand green AND decent jobs, social ownership and democratic control of the production process is generally not on the agenda of Northern Unions.

The largest Brazilian (and largest Latin American) national confederation, CUT, has had ups and downs in its engagement with environmental issues and climate change. It became engaged in the wake of the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. But after that its engagement receded and it was only through cooperation with the Spanish trade union Comisiones Obreras (CCOO), which

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[3] This is still true, even if China is included, since its emissions have only surpassed those of the USA due to the size of its population. According to Wikipedia, if we take the per capita emissions the USA ranks 7 and China 78. The first six highest emitters per capita are the Arab oil countries.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_carbon_dioxide_emissions_per_capita (accessed July 27, 2012)

has a long history of support for environmental concerns, that the issue was addressed again. The theology of liberation, especially the book *Ecology, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Boff 1997) had a significant influence on environmentally engaged trade unionists. In the Brazilian movements there has been a close cooperation between environmental movements and parts of the trade union movements. As one leading member of the Brazilian FBOMS explained, this is due to the fact that the environmental movements in Brazil could not afford to disconnect the struggle against environmental degradation from the struggle against poverty. In fact, some of the most powerful workers' movements are simultaneously environmental movements like the MTS, the movement of landless workers.

Recently (July 2012), the CUT has elected a new secretary with an environmental portfolio, Jasseir Alves Fernandes. Like the former secretary, Carmen Foro, who was the first secretary elected in 2009, he comes from the agricultural union STTR. In her report from the *Rio+20* Carmen Foro declared: "*The crisis is not only economic, but civilisational as well, it is one that requires a struggle for food security, the preservation of life and of ecosystems. It shows that we need to develop immediate measures to address the social, environmental, political and economic questions, which all demand processes of profound transformation.*" (CUT n.d.) As with the South African NUMSA and COSATU, CUT calls for an alternative economic model of development. At *Rio+20* CUT took part in a demonstration against a "green capitalism", where the attack was not against the "green" but against the way in which capitalism appropriates the label in order to increase it profits. While the largest unions in South Africa and Brazil are developing policies against climate change and seeking to work together with environmental movements (in South Africa predominantly with Earthlife Africa), however complicated their relationships might be, the picture in India is altogether different.

In talking to leading trade unionists[4] what became clear through all their differences are two points: firstly, these leaders are all aware of the threat of climate change. Secondly, they see no way in which they can combine their struggle against appalling working conditions with the struggle against environmental degradation, except when the latter is linked directly to health and safety issues at work. As one of the unionists expressed it: "we have to start at the workplace, then broaden to the surroundings of the factories, fighting against pollution, and in a further step we might address issues of pollution of soil and earth happening in the community. That is all we can do, small steps." When asked how workers see that some work, like working with asbestos or in shipbreaking will kill them, one of the unionists answered: "the prospect of death is less of a threat to workers than going hungry and not being able to feed their families." An indication of this is the massive suicide rate amongst farmers

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[4] We spoke to leaders of seven national unions: The Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), The All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS), Steel Workers Federation of India, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the Asian Office of the former IMF, now IndustriAll.

in India[5], largely due to debts as a consequence of having to buy genetically engineered seed from TNCs like Monsanto. This locks them into a dependency relationship with these companies because, as the seed is genetically sterile, they have to buy new seed every season (cf. http://articles.mercola. com/sites/articles/archive/2012/04/03/gmo-crops-affect-farmers.aspx, accessed August 10, 2012).

On the other hand (and this is of course no evidence, only an indication that must remains to be researched) when we asked workers at a truck factory in South India about environmental issues, they complained about the company cutting down trees without replacing them, about painting being conducted outdoors, about the killing of bees, which nested in the factory. Only one of these problems was directly connected to the workers' health. This is only one account yet it begs the question whether are workers are really not interested in environmental issues or whether trade union officials have not found ways to discuss environmental concerns with their members.

To develop an understanding of the differences between India on the one hand and Brazil and South Africa on the other, a few figures might be a good start. According to the World Bank, the percentage of people living under US$1.25 a day was 6.14% in Brazil (2009), 13.7% in South Africa (2009) and 32.67% in India (2010) (http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY accessed July 29, 2012).

Perhaps the most striking difference between the countries is the percentage of people working in the informal sector. In Brazil it is estimated that 39% of the workforce is in this sector, and in South Africa between 24% and 32%. In India, 92% of the working population can be found in the informal sector. This clearly leads to a low union density which is evident from the fact that unions organise a maximum of 10% of the workforce. To this one needs to add the deep fractures in the Indian trade union movement, which have created a multitude of national federations all more or less associated with different political parties. As Sharit Bhowmik writes, when the political party splits, its union splits as well (Bhowmik 2009). But Indian unions are now realising that they need to begin to organise the informal sector, since, as everywhere in the world, the "informal" is creeping into the "formal" sector through the employment of contract workers without or very little social protection and with contracts limited to less than a year. Therefore, as the CITU representative explained, all the unions would be coming together in 2012 to develop a common platform, despite their political differences.

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[5] Based on statistical material of the Indian government, several press releases have reported that around a quarter of a million farmers in India have been recorded to commit suicide over the past 15 years. That is, every 30 minutes a farmer commits suicide in India. See for instance: http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/12/india-more-suicides-than-reforms/ (accessed August 10, 2012), http://www.ipsnews.net/2011/01/suicides-rise-across-india/ (accessed August 11, 2012) and Nagaraj, 2008.

Possible perspectives?

Unions across the world are slowly appreciating that they cannot leave environmental issues to the environmental movements, as one German delegate argued at the COP 15 in Copenhagen. However, this statement was met with some resistance from a majority of the unionists present. At each international meeting on climate change (COP 16, COP 17, Rio+20) the number of unions represented and developing their specific environmental agendas has risen. On the national as well as the international level relationships between unions and environmental movements have improved and members in both bodies are becoming aware that they can only succeed if they work together. The ITUC events at international meetings usually feature important members of environmental movements on the discussion panels (for instance Friends of the Earth in Durban). Likewise, in Rio+20 trade unions were an integral and leading force at the People's Summit. This does not mean that differences and contradictions have disappeared, but we would say that the realisation of opportunities for collabouration between these two movements are increasing.

A more significant problem is that of integrating the struggle against poverty with the struggle against climate change. This is not an issue simply of awareness. The trade union documents make this link consistently. For example, the latest resolution of the ITUC, in which they declare the preconditions of their demands, states:

> Realising that our current profit-driven production and consumption model, identified as the source of rising social inequalities and environmental degradation, must be replaced if a truly sustainable development is to be achieved; (...) Deeply preoccupied with the data demonstrating that almost 60% of the world's workers are without secure employment and that 75% of the world's population is without social protection, as well as with the statistics on worker health and safety which indicate that, despite under-reporting, every 15 seconds a worker dies because of a work-related illness or accident, that every 15 seconds 160 workers fall victim to a work-place accident, worsened by the neoliberal model that has brought about changes in workplace relations (informal labour, outsourcing, subcontracting, export-processing zones (EPZ), among others), leading to ever-greater precariousness; (...) Preoccupied by the fact that twenty years after the Rio Summit of 1992, the environmental and social crises have worsened and sustainable development negotiations have not led to the compromises that could produce changes in production and consumption models, but are, rather, laying the regulatory foundations for the commodification and financialisation of the Commons, of nature and its functions; (...) Aware of the fact that the trade union movement is faced with a diversity of situations across the globe with respect to the right to associate, to organise as trade unions and to collective bargaining, to social dialogue and to decent work, and that in many countries the irresponsible behaviour of certain national and multinational businesses and irresponsible structural adjustment policies lead to the violation of worker and trade union rights. Furthermore, as a result of austerity policies, these rights, which used to be guaranteed, are currently under threat. Convinced, moreover, that combating social dumping is synonymous with protecting the planet; ... (Resolution - 2nd Trade Union Assembly on Labour and Environment, June 10-12, 2012, Rio de Janeiro, http://www.ituc-csi.org/resolution-2nd-trade-union.html accessed July 29, 2012).

But as the Indian example shows, the main problem is to translate these declarations into action. The tragic irony is that those countries which suffer most from the effects of climate change are the least able to connect the struggle for jobs and against poverty with the struggle against climate change because simply surviving is already an effort. Where farmers are committing suicide and workers are dying from diseases acquired through their work, the craving for any kind of work under any conditions is overwhelming and the possibility of connecting the need for work with the need to save the environment is understandably weak.

The trade union movement is pressing governments to implement legislation to improve working conditions and to save the environment. They are demanding from companies and TNCs to provide not only work, but decent work. International unions are campaigning to protect unionists and trade union activism across the globe and especially in countries of the Global South. However, the national and international trade union movement cannot afford to wait until governments and companies listen to their demands. As Rio+20 has depressingly shown, the so-called "leaders" are less than ever prepared, willing and able to lead.

As our research among unionists of the global North and the global South shows, one of the most important tasks for unions if they want to become an international force in times of globalisation is to order their own house. They need to address the continued anachronistic dominance of the North over the South. Northern unions need to use their resources not to subordinate Southern unions' interests to "Regional Reports", outvote the poorer Southern unions (because those with the highest amount of members pay the highest fees and therefore have the highest numbers of votes) and support only building "the trade union house" financially. They need to create a system that is based on solidarity and equality rather than resources. If trade unions cannot practice solidarity and democracy within their own organisations how can they hope to realise these values in society at large?

Coming back to Luxemburg's suggestion of a revolutionary reformism and taking up the ideas of the Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee, as well as Henriksson's suggestion to convert the car industry into one that produces socially useful and environmentally sound products, one can add a further perspective to trade union environmentalism: Unionists need to use their expertise as workers, engineers and civil servants to develop alternative forms of production that can guarantee decent and environmentally sound production processes and products. While it is important to calculate how many green jobs could be created potentially if governments and capital would invest in them, it is equally necessary to develop concrete production alternatives in every country, in every sector, in every workplace. Unions in different countries and unionised as well as non-unionised workers in specific workplaces must see alternatives to the ways in which they are working where they are *now*. Such strategies would also create a "level playing field" allowing unions of the global

North and the global South to learn from each other, since they have different kinds of knowledge.

We are aware that these requirements may sound utopian, maybe even naïve. But if unions cannot overcome their differences and create production alternatives, there are few if any social actors left who can shoulder the burden of struggling for a world in which both labour and nature can be allies in securing the survival of life on earth.

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